

“What’s Going On?” II Kings 2:1-12; II Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9; Psalm 50:1-6 2-26-06

A long time ago I had a friend who always assured me “People change, but not much.” This comment of his was one I had a difficult time accepting although, I have learned through years of closely observing human nature, that his sentiment is sadly true. People in my profession cannot avoid observing human nature. It is often revealed to us over and over again in many different ways. Sometimes it is “confessed to us” other times it is simply shown to us in more subtle ways. If we say we have “heard it all” that is not far from the truth.

As much as we might hope that someone will be able to alter or modify his or her reaction to events in life we know that all the hoping and praying are for naught if the person does not *choose* to become different. That is why so many of us become so predictable over time. We just do not want to change basic facts about our selves and the way we view and react to life. It is much easier to remain in the same ol’, same ol’ pattern. As we grow older it seems we become a little worse. We tend to cover this by saying “things are what they are” or we are “set in our ways.” We are a little like the course of water, we travel the path of least resistance.

Elisha was used to trailing along behind Elijah as if he hoped some of the prophet’s talent would rub off on him. He did not want to make much effort to grow and change on his own as we see in his little prayer that he would receive a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. Elijah had tried to move away from him but Elisha did not take the hint and continued to cling to Elijah until God took him up into God’s presence. Following this, Elisha learned that he had within him the strength and power he needed to move forward through life on his own. It was a surprising transformation for him.

This is the Sunday of the Transfiguration. Our reading from the gospel of Mark records this story for us. It was an amazing event for Peter, James and John to witness. It caught their attention and held them spellbound as well as frightened them. They must have wondered “What’s going on?” They had seen many things happen while traveling with Jesus.

As if seeing their friend changed in such a way was not enough, they also heard the voice of God say :” This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” It was a moment that offered them a chance to take a second look at Jesus and understand who he was and why he had come to them. As we move with them through the remainder of Jesus’ life, there are times we think this little glimpse at their teacher changed their view of him. And there are those other times we see that it did not. The disciples were all human, after all, and they were a little set in their ways of seeing and believing.

In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul seems to be making a response to those who claimed he did not make the gospel clear. It was hidden behind a veil. His slant on the newly evolving religion was different than that of the original disciples and this led to a little sniping on all sides. Paul must have thought he was crystal clear in his writing but as we all know so well, everyone has his or her critics—those dear folks who exist just to find every flaw we might possess. Even today Paul manages to give those of us who read him quite a tussle when it comes to interpreting just what he wrote and why he wrote it. With some effort we can see a bit more clearly what seems to be veiled or seen “through a glass darkly.”

This reminds me of the sniping that goes on in some of our churches in our own day and age. I recently visited one of these churches in which some of the members believe that if others do not think in exactly the same way they do, those “other people” are not seeing the gospel clearly and they are wrong in their interpretation. They do not believe in the ability God has given each of us to seek and find what means the most to us in the message of Christ.

One thing I have always loved about being a Congregationalist is the freedom we have been granted to study and interpret scripture without all of us having to take on this task in the same way. I believe that this freedom allows each one of us to seek and discover God working in our lives in the best possible way. We all have our favorite pieces of scripture, ones we can quote from memory. If we ask a group of people their favorite reading, most likely the readings will

vary depending on what each individual's life experience has been. I know that my life and spiritual journey can never be the same as another person's. We learn from each other by listening and appreciating the ways in which we differ. But there are some who feel far safer if everyone fits in the same space within no deviations. Having been raised with the freedom to study and question, I always find the cookie cutter approach a puzzle. However, for many it is the right way. And I never question another's faith journey.

Many questioned Paul, most likely because he was drawing people into the fold in a new way. He had expanded accessibility to all, even those thought to be unworthy. This was confusing and distressing to the purists among the earliest Christians. I am sure they mumbled to one another "What is going on?" Just as many mumble today.

The season of Lent is fast approaching. In fact, Ash Wednesday is on March 1. It is a time when Christians traditionally begin to reflect on their faith and on the life of the person who founded it. It is the perfect time to add a little more time to consider the ways of God as revealed to us through Jesus and a good time to try to discern what it is God has in mind for us for the future.

It is a time to stop trailing along behind someone else who seems to have some of the answers we are looking for and to step out on our own, knowing we will be supported by our Maker as we examine new pathways of faith. We some effort we can be a little like Elisha coming into our own during the forty days and nights of the season. We can discover that the ability to work on behalf of God and God's kingdom resides within each of us just waiting for us to awaken to its presence.

We can try to see the life, teachings death and resurrection of Jesus with new eyes—a little like the disciples who witnessed his dramatic transfiguration. Perhaps for us, the newness of vision will stay with us and we will find ourselves enriched in our knowledge and our understanding of what it was Jesus tried so hard to tell us all. Maybe we can learn to soften some of our edges when we regard one another and develop more patience and understanding. Maybe we can listen to the wonder and beauty of the hearts that beat within us nudging us to fuller more generous and loving lives.

Or, we can take a longer, closer, more penetrating look at those parts of our Bible that give us great pause, those parts that seem puzzling, not quite clear or even veiled a bit. Very often, if we spend a little time focusing on something we cannot quite comprehend, it begins to become clearer to us. This can happen in all areas of life, not just in studies of the Bible. The meditative days and nights of Lent may be just the ticket to move us forward.

Perhaps, instead of shrugging in puzzlement and wondering, "What's going on?" We will begin to find the answers God has hoped we will discover all along, answers that will lead us forward into becoming more perfect imitations of his Son. Amen