

St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
Lindale, Texas

Last Sunday After the Epiphany  
February 11, 2018  
Mark 9:2-9  
The Reverend John P. Carr

## What to say?

Fear can be a good thing. Fear can keep us out of trouble. Sometimes fear can lead us to respond in a fearful and nervous way to a new situation. When Peter, James and John were suddenly confronted with the transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance of Elijah and Moses, Peter didn't know what to say.

Out of nervousness, while Jesus is experiencing the most profound moment in his ministry on Earth, Peter interrupts them with some human small talk. Peter didn't know what to say.

Then God the Father speaks from a cloud that overshadows them cutting Peter off with, *“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”* Peter did not need to know what to say, he needed to listen. That seems to have ended the event on the mountain top because they were suddenly alone. I imagine Peter did not want to pile rocks but to crawl under one.

We have heard over the last few weeks about the *“fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom”*<sup>1</sup> or understanding, but what the disciples experienced on the mountain was not this type of fear. The word used here, we would use as *terrified*, or from the Greek, literally *scared out of ones wits*.<sup>2</sup> This may explain the response of Peter being off the mark in his words and actions.

Peter meant well but he missed the mark. The disciples saw two men who represented the Law and the Prophets, Moses and Elijah. Jesus is having a conversation with Moses and Elijah who have already been taken to the Father and even his clothes were transfigured into a white beyond human experience. The message that the disciples may have missed is that this experience is expressing the unity of Jesus, the Messiah, with the Law and the Prophets.

They did not understand where Elijah fit into the equation either. As promised, Elijah had returned. Elijah had come as John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Lord, the Messiah, to arrive. John baptized but was rejected by many and ultimately suffered for his preaching by losing his head.

In his preparation for the arrival of Jesus, John the Baptist called on the people to *repent and believe* as he baptized them as did Jesus when he arrived in Galilee.<sup>3</sup> That is what we are doing here today. We are gathering to not only baptize these two young ladies but to renew our own baptismal vows.

Klaryssa and Jade will be asked a series of questions that give them the opportunity to *“reject Satan and the spiritual forces that rebel against God,”* to *“renounce evil and all sinful desires that draw them from the love of God.”*<sup>4</sup>

They will express their willingness *“to turn to Jesus as their Savior and put their whole trust in His grace and love”*<sup>5</sup> and follow Him.

This is repenting, this is turning to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Jesus also called on the people to not only repent but to *believe*. Along with Klaryssa and Jade, we will all express what we believe about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as we repeat our Baptismal Covenant.<sup>6</sup>

Today’s Baptism is an expression of our beliefs. We believe that in the waters of Baptism our old self is washed away and a new self, a new creation is born and revealed. This image is the image of baptism in the River Jordan where John would fully immerse the person being baptized and then bring them back into the world to draw a new breath as a new creation who had dedicated themselves to God. The old self was washed away in the waters of Baptism.

The early Christian baptisms reflect this concept. They were carved into rock with a set of steps descending into a rectangular pool of water where the baptized would be immersed. Upon their rising from the water, they did not go back up the same old stairs as they descended, they went up a new set of stairs on the opposite side of the pool because they are a new creation.

Last November I was able to travel to the River Jordan and step into it thinking about John the Baptist and that perhaps he had been to this same place. As I stepped into the clear flowing water my feet stirred the muddy bottom and the area became so cloudy with mud that I could not see the bottom. My arrival had muddied the waters.

Perhaps it was a good metaphor that my stepping into the waters of the Jordan muddied the water and then as the water flowed by in the current, the water by my feet became clear. The flowing waters of the Jordan had washed away my mud, my metaphorical sins. The washing away of sins was not by any of my efforts but only by the grace of God and the flowing water of the Jordan.

Today Klaryssa and Jade will be baptized with some of that clear water from the River Jordan that I brought back with me. This symbolic immersion is a clear image that they too are washed by the waters of baptism. Through these waters, they will receive *“the forgiveness of sin, and they will be raised to a new life of grace.”*<sup>7</sup> They will be a new creation in the kingdom of God.

This outward and visible sign of a new inward and spiritual truth marks them as Christ’s own forever.

It is up to us, this Christian community, to support them in their new life in Christ.

Amen

1. Psalm 111:10
2. Key Word Study Bible, Greek dictionary, entry 1630, p.27
3. Mark 1:15
4. Book of Common Prayer, p. 302
5. Book of Common Prayer, p. 302
6. Book of Common Prayer, Baptismal Covenant p. 304
7. Book of Common Prayer, p. 308, para 1.