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So here we are...the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany. Today, we bring one season to a close and prepare for another.

The season of Epiphany has been all about discovering who Jesus is. We heard stories over the past eight weeks that pointed to a particular truth about who Jesus was. Like the story of his baptism in the Jordan where God called him "Beloved." And the wedding at Cana where he turned huge vats of water into wine, giving us a glimpse of a kingdom of extravagance and plenty. Then that idea of abundance was reinforced when we heard the story of Jesus visiting the fishermen on the banks of the Sea of Galilee and filling their nets to bursting with fish before inviting them to follow him. Then there's the message that we hear in his preaching. Jesus proclaimed that he was sent for the salvation of *all* people, and he made some enemies in his hometown when rather than stay and focus on their needs, he set out to share his healing power far and wide.

These stories reveal Jesus as the one whose grace and generosity knows no bounds. The one who comes to bring peace and to turn the order of the world upside down by calling down blessings and healing on the least of these. The one who is chosen and beloved by God.

We began this season of epiphany, of course, with the story of the Magi, the Wise Men. Richard Meux Benson, the great Anglican contemplative, captivated by this encounter in Bethlehem between the Magi and the infant Jesus, wrote of the power that was revealed to them at that meeting. He wisely noted that just as they were changed in that encounter, we, too must be changed when the nature of Jesus is revealed to us. Benson wrote,

"The wise men cannot return to their own country by the same way they used to come to Bethlehem. While they cannot go the same route because of Herod, we cannot go the same way once we have met Christ. We emerge from our encounter with Christ as changed people. We cannot follow the same path as before. Like the wise men, we must seek out Christ, but we will always leave as transformed people."

It is traditional to hear the story of the transfiguration of Jesus on this last Sunday of Epiphany. This story is fitting as it perhaps best captures this idea of the transformation we will all experience after encountering the true nature of Jesus.

The Transfiguration story is a mountain-top experience, one cloaked in mystery and awe just as mountain top experiences should be. Standing on the mountain, all of a sudden Jesus was not alone. With him were Moses, the great liberator of the Hebrew people from Egypt...and Elijah, famous Israelite prophet. They each had their own mountaintop experiences which is perhaps why they came to this mountain to visit Jesus. Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. When he came down to meet the people after his encounter with God, his face radiated the glory of God's presence. Elijah met God on a mountain, too, where God was made known to him with a still, small, voice.

Even in their sleepy confusion, the disciples were amazed to see Jesus transfigured and Moses and Elijah deep in conversation with him. The face of Jesus is dazzling white as he listens to these past leaders of Israel. Our text says they spoke of his departure, but it can also be translated exodus. Moses saved the people of Israel by leading them on an exodus out of Egypt. But for Jesus, exodus meant walking toward the place of persecution. Jesus will save by walking toward the cross. It is there that he will make possible the redemption of the world, not through violence and victory but through suffering, death and resurrection.

The disciples, however, couldn't hear this conversation and all they could see was Jesus standing in glory. And not surprisingly, they wanted to stop time. They wanted to build a place of worship, a place of rest. Perhaps they saw an opportunity to escape from the chaos and the demands of the life they had been living following Jesus in his ministry.

But just as the Wise Men emerged from Bethlehem as changed people once they had encountered the infant Jesus, the disciples will also be changed when they see the glory of God revealed in the person of Jesus. They will be given a new charge. They will see Jesus transfigured, and they will hear the voice of God commanding them to listen to his words. From then on, they will have to take a different path. The way home will not be the path they had expected.

While their first desire may have been to stay on the mountain, worshiping the glory of Jesus, they quickly see that the face of Jesus is still turned toward Jerusalem. Turned toward the Cross. And they will have to figure out what that means for them—disciples committed to following in his footsteps.

This story of the disciples and Jesus on the mountaintop reminds me of why we gather in this sanctuary each Sunday, and why some of you join us online, still seeking to be part of the body of Christ, even if you need to be physically distant. We all have a need to gather and worship and be transformed. Now, I am certainly not saying that any of you have a mountaintop moment every time we worship together. But this beautiful worship space with its vaulted ceilings and light shining through the stained glass and our ancient liturgy of praising God, hearing the word, confessing, praying, and then gathering at the table to receive God into our very selves...all of these elements are meant to transform us so that we might go forth from here to transform the world, choosing the path in which Jesus leads us.

But like the disciples, it's awfully easy to want to stay and worship instead of following Jesus back into the world with his mission in mind. It would be easy to use the church as an escape from the pain and suffering in the world...especially in these days as we watch a war unfolding in Europe on top of all the other human and environmental tragedies going on in the world.

So like James and John and Peter, we can stop for a moment to worship, but then we must be prepared to follow Jesus out to the places that need the loving and transformative power of God. And if the season of Epiphany has helped us to understand who Jesus is, the season of Lent which we enter into next week, asks that we consider **who we are** in light of what we know of Jesus. It is a time to look inside ourselves to see the ways we have fallen short in our commitments and then vow anew to be transformed by our relationship with Jesus. We'll do that work together in the next

few weeks as we walk through the season of Lent. And we'll work to grow in our discipleship so that we are prepared to follow Jesus out into the world. Amen.