

Last Epiphany.A.17
2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9
The Rev. Melanie McCarley

The Gospel lesson appointed for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany is the same for all three years of the Lectionary. It is always the story of the Transfiguration. Take a moment to picture Peter, James and John gazing at the sight of Jesus. Matthew tells us that: *“Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.”* It’s a stunning vision amounting a visual confirmation of the nature of Jesus as the Son of God and promised Messiah. It makes me wonder how difficult it must have been to leave the mountain-top and return to the valley below.

There’s a reason events such as these are called “Mountain-top experiences”—suddenly, we see things from a different, larger and perhaps even a panoramic perspective. These are evanescent moments where, for a brief, shining span of time the veil is lifted, and before us we behold glory. Then, all too soon, we return to the present and the life that awaits us in the world as we experience it on a daily basis. These are moments that may last for hours or—more frequently, mere seconds.

Yet mountain-top experiences are important. They gift us with vision. They give us a wider perspective and are a reminder that the world, as we experience it day-to-day, is not all there is. Think of it this way, what Peter, James and John saw was a glimpse of an even more true and tangible reality than what we experience in our earthly existence.

Now, I cannot promise you an event rivaling that of the Transfiguration at our Annual Meeting. That is well beyond my means. However, rather than a mountain-top experience, I can offer you a balcony view of our life together at St. Paul’s. So, rather than imagining that you are standing on a mountain-top, picture yourself on a balcony, overlooking a dance taking place on the floor beneath.

If you are a dancer on the lower level, ask yourself—what do you see? Basically, yours is a horizontal view of the people engaged in the dance. You see what is immediately before your eyes. On the balcony, however, you behold the dance from a different perspective—you have a larger view. From here you can see the band playing and the dancers as a whole. You can even see who is standing by the wall, who is attempting to spike the punch and who is making an attempt to sneak out early via the side door.

Likewise, the Annual Meeting, gives you something of a balcony view of our parish. Looking through the Annual Report, you can see what ministries we have and who is involved. By reading the Warden's Report and Rector's Report, you can see the larger picture of the past year, and by studying the budget and Treasurer's Report you can track the financial health of our community of faith. The Annual Meeting is an opportunity to gain a fuller picture of St. Paul's than we normally see on any given Sunday.

That's the balcony-view, offered through today's Church Meeting. Yet, what I'd like for you to do now, is to look a bit further and gaze, with me, into the future. Recall the Gospel message of the Transfiguration and that moment the apostles saw Jesus reigning in splendor—what they beheld was the present reality of the Son of God. Yet, they were also, in some way, peering into the future. What they saw was the vision of their Savior they would meet in Heaven. In this manner, I'm asking that you look beyond the present moment to a larger vision of who God is calling us to be. So, while you will certainly not see me suddenly sprout a nimbus round my head and begin to glow—I do hope, that what you will picture, is a future for St. Paul's that is bright with the hope of following God's will for us as a community of faith.

As I begin my second year in this holy place, I ask myself, where do I see God leading us? Here is my hope: First that we continue to grow our community here in Dedham, working hard not only to welcome people who come to worship with us— but stretching ourselves to *invite* people as well. That's a tall order for naturally reticent New-Englanders—but it comes down to the Gospel's instructions for each of us as followers of Christ to "*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation...*" (Mark 16:15). This is our challenge. Give some thought to inviting someone to worship—a family member or a friend, a person who's recently moved into the area, someone who is going through a difficult time and would benefit from the support of a praying community.

This year we'll live into this by expanding our involvement in the larger community of Boston by volunteering to assist in the B-SAFE, summer enrichment program for disadvantaged youths. Later this summer, Aidan and Kyle Mackenzie, in addition to myself, will venture beyond our fair state of Massachusetts to represent our Diocese at the Episcopal Youth Event in Oklahoma City. And, on March 26th we will be inviting all of you who are interested in the possibility of establishing a mission trip from St. Paul's to join us for a meeting after worship to examine the possibilities that exist for missions within the continental United States and beyond. If I hope for a theme to infuse this year, it would be that of stretching—not something as

large as jumping off a cliff—but pulling us just enough out of our comfort zone so that we can see that with God’s help, we can do amazing things.

The flip side to any mountain-top experience or balcony view, is this--at some point, like Peter, James and John, we must descend the mountain or, leave the balcony, making our way down the stairs to join, once again, in the dance. Think of it this way—the view we are offered is both a gift as well as an imperative from on high. The chance to see the larger picture of our church forms a compelling vision of what we can become as a community of faith and, for just a moment, it enables us to see who we already are in the eyes of God. For us, you see, the goal is not to be transfigured, but to become transformed—and it is to that end that we continue to look and work for the coming Kingdom of God. In Jesus’ name. *Amen.*