

“Six days later,”

Six days after what? For the answer to that question we need to go back to verse 27 in chapter 8 that reads “Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ And they answered him. ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’” Then in verses 31-33 Jesus tells the disciples about his upcoming suffering and resurrection. And then starting 8:34 through the opening verse of chapter 9 where our lesson is found Jesus told any person in the crowds thinking about following him that they must deny themselves and take up their cross.

It is six days later after Jesus is proclaimed Messiah, who will suffer and have followers who are willing to suffer that Jesus takes Peter, James and John to this special encounter.

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. It is fascinating that the church of Jesus Christ that has existed nearly 2,000 years and has over a billion adherents started with Jesus, crowds that followed him, twelve individuals that he selected for special instruction and three to be in his inner circle. That suggests that we can do some very special things here at St. Paul with a committed core of disciples dedicated to the way of Jesus. Jesus had a committed core of 12 and within that an inner circle of 3.

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John. Do you remember this threesome earlier in the gospel of Mark? Let’s look at chapter 5, let me pick it up with verse 35,

³⁵ While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

Jesus taught the crowds, instructed the twelve and gave Peter, James and John special insights. It is the three, the twelve and the crowds that “Step Out” to change the world following Jesus’ resurrection. Those “Stepping Out” were willing to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Christ. That is what Jesus looks for in each gathering of his followers. Are you willing to “Step Out” and change the world for Christ?

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John. Remember this threesome later in the 14th chapter of Mark? Let me pick it up with verse 32,

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴ And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” ³⁷ He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸ Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

It is reassuring to know that Jesus can work through those who are “willing but are weak.” “Stepping Out” with willingness to deny oneself, take up a cross and follow Christ is what Jesus looks for in each gathering. Do you

want to “Step Out” and change the world for Christ? If so, know that Jesus can work through those who are “willing but are weak.” That’s me. How about you?

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. A couple of questions emerge here.

First, why “by themselves”?

After Jesus took these three “by themselves” into the house back in chapter 5 when he heals a twelve year old girl they know that something special is about to take place as they go off “by themselves” with Jesus. This heightens their attention. Isn’t this natural? I know that if Marjorie approaches me in a gathering of people and says she needs to talk to me alone, that will heighten my attention! If the Bishop, my big boss, calls me on the phone or sends me an e-mail with a request for me to visit him in his office, that will heighten my attention!

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. Now the second question.

Why a high mountain? It prepares them for who they are going to see. Remember who they meet?

“And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”

Please remember these historic figures of Judaism. Elijah is the great prophet of Judaism. There are many prophets in Judaism as you will see as you leaf through the names of the books at the end of the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament. Yet, Elijah is the greatest, taken in a whirlwind in a fiery chariot to heaven at the end of his life. Old Testament prophets spoke the truth to those in power who were abusing their power and position. After Elijah tells the truth to the corrupt King and Queen of Israel he barely escapes with his life. He runs and finds refuge on the mountain top. It is there that he hears the “still small voice of God” that gives him to courage to continue to speak out the truth as a prophet for God. That is “Stepping Out” in ministry!

Why a mountain? It prepares them for who they are going to see. Yes, Elijah the prophet and then Moses, the giver of the law. You do remember Moses’ mountain top experience, on Sinai, do you not? Yes, during the Exodus from slavery in their journey to the Promised Land the people of Israel stop at the base of Mount Sinai as Moses goes up to the top to encounter God and what does he come down with? Yes, the Law, the Ten Commandments, the guidelines for living as healthy and humane people. Moses was “Stepping Out” in ministry as he shared the Ten Commandments.

Peter, James and John look up to see Elijah the great prophet and Moses the giver of the Law before them. These are the G.O.A.T.S. of Judaism. The G.O.A.T.S., “Greater Of All Time”, are before Peter, James and John. Yet did you notice what occurred just before and just after the appearance of Elijah and Moses?

Let’s look at the before in verses 2 & 3 as it reads

“And Jesus was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white...”

Peter, James and John have had hints regarding the divine nature of Jesus as he has healed and revived people but this transfiguration that changed not only the clothes of Jesus but his very presence reveals his divine nature.

Up to now our gospel lesson is mostly history lesson. This last aspect compliments it with an affirmation of faith regarding Jesus’ nature as having a divine dimension. History lessons are important as we acknowledge in February with Black History Month. Janice Gilmore’s article in World Herald this past Monday shared this perspective. Ms. Gilmore noted,

Black History Month was created in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson, a widely known African-American historian, educator, publisher and scholar. It began as Negro History Week, and in 1976 became a month long celebration in February to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Gilmore goes on to write,

Some still cannot understand why a month was set aside to celebrate a specific race. Carter Woodson contended that the teaching of black history was “essential to ensure the physical and intellectual survival of the race within a broader society.”

Black History Month remembers many aspects of African American life including the time they “Stepped Out” from slavery for justice, equality and basic human dignity.

Likewise, as we remember Moses, Elijah, and Jesus in our Transfiguration gospel lesson it is a history lesson that grounds us in our faith. Yet, it is more than that. It is an affirmation of faith regarding Jesus’ nature as having a divine dimension. Finally, our lesson is also a call to action for each of here as noted in verse 7.

⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice,
“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Before we “Step Out” to live our lives in the spirit Christ we must first “listen to him!” That guides us to read the words of Jesus in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each and every day. “Listen to him!” That encourages to make time for silence in the midst of our daily to prayer so we might hear the still small voice of Christ in our hearts. “Listen to him!” That is the spring board for us to “Step Out” in ministry, individually and collectively. “Listen to him!”