

## BEING WHERE?

Sermon, February 26, 2017

Transfiguration Sunday

Texts: Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9, II Peter 1:16-21

We just read in the Gospel text, "After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John ..." Six days after ... what? Does anybody remember? All three Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration precede the Transfiguration with this event; we talked about this a few times in years past.

Six days ago, Jesus had asked His disciples what people were saying about Him. In response, Peter, made this memorable confession ... the first Apostles' Creed ... "You are the Christ, the son of the Living God." Now, that was one of those crescendo moments in the entire New Testament, a real high point of insight, revelation, inspiration. Peter confesses, puts into words, what all the apostles have come to realize ... they have come to the wonderful realization they have been actually walking and talking and sharing life these past few years with God in the flesh, the Christ, the long hoped for Messiah! I could well imagine Peter following up that confession with these words: "Jesus, you are the Man! We have seen you in action. You are the one who can make things happen; You are the One we've been waiting for!" Understandably, Peter had big dreams and high hopes for what Jesus would do.

And then, to Peter's astonishment, Jesus began talking about suffering and going to a cross and being killed. Peter responded, "No, Lord!" (Which, by the way, is something of an oxymoron ... You can't say "No" and "Lord" in the same breath ... but that's another sermon.) "No, Lord! This will never happen to you!" Peter was a man of action; he was a "can do" kind of guy. He believed the whole point of having a Savior was to avoid things like suffering and hardship and crosses. Peter has a lot invested in this; he has left his home, his work and has committed all he has to Jesus. Many of us can identify, at least in part, with the raw emotion Peter must have been experiencing. Many of you know what it is to have invested time, love, energy and emotion in someone ... a child, a friend, a spouse, a mentor ... and all of a sudden the one in whom you have invested so much love, time, energy and devotion just seems hell-bent on a path of personal destruction. It rips your heart out; it tears you apart. You just want to grab them and say, "No! Stop! What are you doing? Don't head down this path!" Well, that's Peter!

As I've pointed out in years past, Peter really was a FAT disciple. No, he's not overweight; at least, I don't think he was. Peter was Faithful, Available, Teachable. F, **Faithful**. He loves Jesus; he's loyal, in fact, he's the first to recognize and acknowledge Jesus' identity and divinity. Peter is also **A, Available**; he has dropped everything and committed himself to following Jesus. That's what it meant to be a disciple, to always **be there** with Jesus, to be at his beck and call, no matter what. Discipleship is about faithfully **being there**. Now, I ask you to hold that thought for a moment.

Born in 1889, Martin Heidegger was the son of the sexton of a village church in Germany, who went on to become one of the world's great philosophers. In 1927, Heidegger published his first and best known work entitled **Sein und Zeit** (*Being and Time*, a prodigious work which helped him win the philosophy professorship at the University of Freiburg). **Sein und Zeit** is noted as one of the central philosophical works of the twentieth century.. I can just see the excitement in your eyes; "Yay, the pastor's going to discuss twentieth century philosophy ..." but bear with me a moment; I think you'll find this interesting!

Basically (and this is really an oversimplification), Heidegger was in opposition to the seventeenth century philosophy of René Descartes who defined the essence of "being" in our ability to think. Most of you are familiar with Descartes' famous summary: "Cogito, ergo sum" ... which means, "I think, therefore I am." (My college Introduction to Philosophy professor liked to point out an extra "cogito" was really needed ... that Descartes should have more accurately stated, "I think, therefore I am ... I think." The same professor liked to tell the joke about Descartes walking into a bar, ordering a drink, and when the bartender asked if he would like another, the philosopher replied, "I think not." And POOF, he disappeared!) For Martin Heidegger, the essence of being, the essence of who we are, is not just in our thinking ... the meaning of our existence is not defined by our mind but in our *interaction* with the world around us. It's not just about "sein," being ... it's about being THERE. He coined the German term "Dasein" (combining "das" and "sein", which, roughly translated means "Being there." By the way, and this is really an aside, some of you may have seen that wonderfully charming 1979 Peter Seller's movie, "Being There." Time won't allow a full explanation, but to really appreciate that film one needs to have at least an acquaintance with Heidegger's philosophy; it is the source of the movie's title. The gist of the film is that the main character is basically an imbecile who DOESN'T really think, and who by a series of interactions goes on to become the senior advisor of the President of the United States.). In short, "being" is not just about "thinking." It's not just about head knowledge and contemplation, it is also about action and interaction, our being is inextricably wrapped up in what we do, it is about being THERE, interacting with the world around us. As Wayne Dyer more colloquially expressed it: "You are what you do, and when you don't, you aren't." When you are what you do, then when you don't, you aren't! If we aren't

interacting with the environment around us, that creates something of a crisis of "being", a crisis of identity and purpose. Which, by the way, is the philosophical source of what's so disconcerting about, say, retirement, or being laid off, or about the "empty nest" syndrome. This is, again, almost another sermon, but when our identity is so wrapped up in what we do and we are no longer "doing" what it is we do, it creates something of an existential crisis of being and purpose, which is why it is so important that we find our identity and our purpose in something larger than just our job or our marital or parental status. I was speaking with a funeral director this week who made the grim observation of how retirement for so many men, in particular, is almost a death knell, as their health often fails so quickly afterward ... we really do need to find our identity in more than just our work.

Now ... with all that said, let's get back to the Bible story. It was on the night Jesus was betrayed, Peter made his infamous denial about being a disciple. I'm in a minority on this, but I think Peter denied being a disciple not because of fear or fecklessness, I think he denied being a disciple because of his *integrity*. "Are you a disciple?" he was asked. "No! I am not a disciple of Jesus!" he emphatically responded, and I could imagine him adding, "Not anymore." To Peter, on that dark night, that was his honest (and "Hiedeggerian") response. All seemed lost. It was over. He knew Jesus was going to the cross, and he knew he would not follow Him there. After all, what would be the point? It would be fruitlessly suicidal. And this man, who had often proved himself as a faithful and fearless disciple, this man knew that if you're not willing to follow Jesus Christ, then *by definition* you are no longer a disciple! "You are what you do, and when you don't, you aren't." So, when Peter realized he was not being a disciple, he had the integrity and the honor to say so; he would not pretend to be someone he wasn't. This was, of course, prior to the resurrection; when it became clear to Peter that death is not the end, when he came to understand things he had not understood before, Peter was restored as a disciple. As amply demonstrated after the Resurrection, Peter was T, *Teachable*. Like all disciples of Jesus, Peter doesn't always understand everything about Jesus at first ... especially when Jesus talks about such things as hardship and suffering and bearing crosses ... but eventually, he does, because he is faithful, available and teachable.

So, six days after that original confession, Jesus invites Peter along with James and John, two other ambitious, energetic and FAT disciples, to come with Him to this mountain. When they get there, Jesus then appears a more glorious figure than they could have ever imagined. We are told that, "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. Just then, there appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus." This is what Peter was hoping for, this was BIG! This was the biggest Jesus yet! Bright, shiny, attractive, powerful, hanging out with Moses and Elijah! Peter even suggests putting up shelters so they can stay right there and make the most of the moment, but suddenly they are enveloped in a cloud just like Moses was centuries earlier, and the voice of God speaks audibly, "This is my Son, Whom I love ... LISTEN TO HIM!" Note it is *then* that the disciples become afraid, and they fall on their faces. Jesus who is aglow, Jesus the miracle man ... that certainly impresses them, but doesn't seem to frighten them. But the voice of God, that's something else! And I don't think it's just the Voice that terrifies them, it's what the Voice is demanding. "Listen to My Son!" "LISTEN TO HIM calling you to a new understanding of how it is. LISTEN TO HIM calling you to a higher way to live. LISTEN TO HIM as He calls you to follow where He leads." Listen to this One Who may have some hard things to say to you; His words are for your good! Listen to this One, trust this One, Who is talking about leading you places you may not want to go." We are told that as they are on their faces in fear Jesus came, touched them and said, "Get up. And don't be afraid." "Get up, don't be afraid; let's go!"

That's what Peter writes about in the passage read earlier: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Peter reiterates, "We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain." Peter writes this letter knowing that his first century readers were facing many dark difficulties and dangers in the persecution to come. Peter says to them, in the midst of whatever they may be facing, that our faith in Jesus Christ is not grounded on myths or clever stories or specious hopes; it's *real!* I'm sure the vivid memory of this Transfiguration experience kept him going through some very dark times. In this moment on the Mount, Jesus confirmed Peter's earlier confession. He also confirmed He would have to go by way of the Cross, by way of betrayal and rejection and suffering and death, but on the other side of all this He would be raised in eternal life and glory. Yes, He was going to suffer; but Yes, all would be well. On that mountain they are given a glimpse into how it will all turn out; it was clear Jesus knew what He was doing and what He was about to do. Moses and Elijah were there to confirm it. By **being there**, and being given this glorious glimpse of glory, these disciples can see that no matter what they may have to endure, their story ... and our story ... will turn out well.

One closing thought: Richard Halverson, Presbyterian pastor and Chaplain of the U.S. Senate fourteen years in the eighties and early nineties, had a favorite benediction: "Wherever you go, God is sending you, wherever you are, God has put you there; He has a purpose in your **being there**. Christ who indwells you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this, and go in His grace and love and power."