

Sermon: A Glimpse of the Kingdom

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, March 2, 2025)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The Cathedral of Christ the Light, located in Oakland, California, is a newly built cathedral of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Oakland—first cathedral built entirely in the 21st century. Completed in 2009 at the cost of \$175 million dollars, the Cathedral of Christ the Light is a grandiose complex, housing the cathedral church, the chancery office of the bishop of Oakland, a conference centre, residence for priests, a health clinic, a cafe, a souvenir shop and a mausoleum, with twelve crypts reserved for bishops, priests, or members who could afford the price tag.

The complex was designed by architect Craig W. Hartman, with the symbolic representation of Jesus Christ at its core. On the cover of this week's bulletin, we see the interior view of the Cathedral, with a 58-foot high image of the glorified Jesus within the Omega window, created by natural light passing through aluminum panels that have been pierced with 94,000 holes. As the sun moves across the sky, the movement of light magnifies the majesty of Christ, symbolizing the movement of salvation history, while transforming the worship space, and all the worshippers within.

It is a marvel to behold, rich in its beauty and its theological meaning. One can almost see and feel the presence of God in that sanctified space, that modern tabernacle made not of fabrics and wood, but of glass and aluminum. When Christ was transfigured on a mountaintop, appearing in radiant glory with Moses and Elijah, the disciples wanted to build three booths, one for each of them. When we build cathedrals, such as the strikingly transcendental Cathedral of Christ the Light, are we trying also to 'build a booth' to contain the divine?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we come again to the Sunday of Transfiguration, as once a year we meditate on the Scriptural meaning of the earthly Jesus transfigured. How should we approach this text? Is this a misplaced resurrection narrative, as some say? Is it a story arising from the Hellenistic mystery tradition, as others claim? Is it epiphany, whereby Christ

is revealed to the gentiles, to us all? Is it theophany, whereby God is heard clearly, affirming the identity of Jesus, as the beloved Son?

The Lectionary reading today of Luke 9:28-36, took place after the confession of Peter, that Jesus is the “Messiah”, or “the Christ, of God”. It took place after Jesus openly foretold his suffering, his rejection, his death and eventually his resurrection. This text will be followed by Jesus, accompanied by his disciples, coming down from the mountain, into the messy affairs of humanity, and whereby the Lord would soon “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (v.51).

While going up to that mountaintop, Jesus took with him Peter, John and James, three of his favourite, supposedly to pray. Prayer has always been an integral part of Jesus in his earthly ministry. Such quiet time with God is where Jesus finds his source, his strength, and his shelter. Prayer is how Jesus maintains that close intimacy with his Abba Father in Heaven. And while Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Not only that, the disciples also saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to Jesus. Here the Scripture is quite specific in verse 31 —they appeared in glory.

Though the three disciples were weighed down with sleep, they nevertheless witnessed the glory of Jesus, and the two men with him, in an event which we understand as the Transfiguration of Christ. The disciples did not fully grasp what was before them. They failed to understand that the presence of Moses and Elijah is symbolic of Christ coming in fulfilment of the Laws and Prophets of Israel. They failed to understand the journey before Jesus to Jerusalem is patterned after the salvation history of Israel through the Exodus. The disciples was given a glimpse of the divine, but its eschatological meaning that the Kingdom of God is at hand, the world as they knew it is coming to an end seems to elude the three disciples.

So Peter suggested a silly scheme to set up booths or tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, kind of like going on a camping trip with your buddies. His suggestion reads to us now as a comical moment, heightened only by a quick rebuke coming from the clouds: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” (v.35) As suggested by Lori Brandt Hale, contributing in Feasting on the Word series of biblical commentary, “All that is missing is the cosmic hand, reaching down to give Peter a good “you-are-missing-the-point” slap upside the head.”

Perhaps we shouldn't be too hard on Peter. His intention was probably more aligned with the tradition of the Jewish feast of Tabernacles,

whereby the principal theme of such celebration was the presence of God accompanying the Israelites, for forty years through the wilderness. Building a booth, or a tent, was Peter's way of acknowledging the presence of God in the glory of Christ. It was his way of trying to capture that glimpse of the glory, that glimpse of the Kingdom. It is a divine mystery! No words are adequate to the task of describing what happened on that mountaintop. No actions are sufficient to the task of preserving that glimpse of glory. Such mystery draws us in, and at the same time it eludes our full comprehension.

Let me share with you a little secret: something that I have discovered about the sanctuary of St. Giles, particularly of the Logan Vencta window facing Bank Street. During the summer months, particularly during the afternoon, when the sun is shining directly onto that stained glass window, try standing on the balcony section, beside the window, and put your hand on the stained glass. You could feel a steady vibration emanating from it, as one is also engulfed in a dazzling array of colours and a strange comforting warmth.

I pray there sometimes. It is as if at that location, in the right circumstances, the presence of God could be felt, seen, and even touched. It is glorious. One does not need to do anything to preserve it, or to capture it. One could always go back to it. Don't take my word, try it yourself, and let me know what you experience. I am thankful of this tabernacle we call St. Giles. It's not quite a cathedral, but sometimes I feel like I am living in the Scripture, in the concluding verse of Psalm 23, "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*"

However, the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus reminds me, reminds us, that we are called not to live on the mountaintop. The glimpse of the Kingdom is meant to recharge the disciples, to refuel us, of the conviction to follow Jesus, carrying our own cross down the mountain, into the messiness of humanity, in the heart of the Glebe where many do not know their right hand from their left, and are acutely in need of the Good News of Jesus Christ. I am thankful to be called to this task at hand, and hope that you are as well.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**