This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!

A sermon for the last Sunday of Epiphany, February 27, 2022

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Christ be with me,
be after me,
be before me,
and be at my right and left hand.
May everything I do be for Christ. Amen.

Imagine for a moment that you are Peter or John or James going with Jesus one morning to pray on a mountain. It probably did not seem that unusual to you when you set out. You had been with Jesus for some time, and you had seen him with crowds of people preaching and teaching and healing, and you had also seen him take time to himself to pray. You have no idea that you are about to experience something utterly awe inspiring and life changing.

Eight days ago Jesus had asked you and the other disciples who people said he was. You answered that people think he is John the Baptist, or Elijah, or another one of the ancient prophets who had returned. Jesus asked you who you thought he is. You had answered the Messiah of God after which Jesus had told you and the other disciples that he would undergo great suffering, be rejected, killed, and resurrected. What a difficult message that must have been for you to hear from the Messiah. You had been with Jesus and seen the great works he was doing. Your expectation had surely not been that he would be murdered. Instead you likely thought he would triumphantly overturn the kingdoms and systems of the world that oppressed the people of God.

So Jesus takes you up on a mountain to pray. While Jesus is praying you suddenly see the appearance of his face change. Although Luke doesn't describe it, Matthew says Jesus' face shone like the sun, and you see his clothes become dazzling white as he is glorified. The transfiguration of Jesus overwhelms you and then suddenly you see two men who you somehow instinctually know are Moses and the prophet Elijah. They are talking with Jesus about Jesus' upcoming departure. And then a cloud comes and overshadows all of you. From that cloud you hear the voice of God saying, "This is my son, my chosen; listen to him!" Imagine hearing the voice of God!

Now you have seen Moses and Elijah with Jesus, seen Jesus transfigured, and had a close and intimate encounter with God, all of which affirms for you that Jesus is the Messiah, and you are told by God to listen to him. How do you think you would have responded to such an encounter had you been there?

We can't ever truly know what that experience must have been like for them. What we do know from scripture is that Peter and John and James did listen to Jesus. They listened to what Jesus taught them, listened to his commandments to love, listened to

his imperatives to help those in need, and they spent the remainder of their lives spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ to anyone who would listen.

The words God spoke from the cloud, “This is my son, my chosen; listen to him!” were not only for Peter, John, and James. God’s words are for all of us. God’s words are a call to follow Jesus, to love, and to respect the dignity of everyone. God’s words are a call to discipleship.

Episcopalian theologian Verna Dozier wrote this in her book *the Dream of God*: Discipleship, not worship, is what Jesus called for… Jesus did not call human beings to worship him, but to follow him. Worship is setting Jesus on a pedestal, distancing him, enshrining him in liturgies, stained glass windows, biblical translations, medallions, pilgrimages to places where he walked. Following him is doing what he did, weeping over a situation that was so far removed from the dream of God and spending his life to make it different. Following is discipleship.

As a congregation, we are followers of Jesus when we reject racism and share that message on our sign along Oakland Mills Road. We are followers of Jesus when we affirm that Christ Church welcomes our LGBTQ+ siblings and we show this affirmation and allyship in the Episcopal shield graphic on our website. We are followers of Jesus when we welcome our Afghan refugee family and help them to build a new life in a new country and pray with them for God's protection for their father and son who still remain in hiding in Afghanistan. We are followers of Jesus when we work with organizations such as Bridges to Housing Stability and Dream Builders to give people the resources necessary to rebuild and change their lives.

In a time when our world is increasingly divided, it is urgent that we continue to work as God’s disciples in the world, showing the world that the way of love is always better than the way of hate, better than the way of greed, better than the way of grasping for power, better than the way of violence.

We have not always listened well to who God calls us to be. Truly we are a long way from the world God dreamed of in his creation. In the world God created there was no hunger, oppression, greed, poverty, loneliness, hatred, or violence. Let us commit to listening to Jesus, let us commit to being his disciples, let us commit to follow his radical call to love everyone, and let us commit to working together to change the world so it becomes the place that God dreamed of when he created it. When you go out the doors of Christ Church today take go into the world as a follower of Jesus spreading the Good News.

I close today with prayers for the people of Ukraine and all those under threat of violence in the world. I have been deeply troubled as I am sure you have been these past days by what is happening to our brothers and sisters in Ukraine so let us lift the people of Ukraine in prayers for safety, for peace, and for comfort. This is a prayer for the people of Ukraine written by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell.

Let us pray.

God of peace and justice, we pray for the people of Ukraine today. We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons. We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow, that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them. We pray for those with power over war or peace, for wisdom, discernment and compassion to guide their decisions. Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at-risk and in fear, that you would hold and protect them. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.