

Last Sunday after the Epiphany
Year B

I Kings 19:9-18
II Peter 1:16-21

Psalm 27
St. Mark 9:2-9

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Today is the last Sunday of Epiphany, the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord, and World Mission Sunday.

World Mission Sunday is the newest in this list, having been established by an act of the General Convention in 1997. It is the Sunday in which we are to remember in particular the need for Mission in the world around us. Both close to home and so very, very far away. And considering all the trouble in the world around us today, perhaps we should spend some serious time thinking about World Mission Sunday.

In his book, The Four Pages of the Sermon, A Guide to Biblical Preaching, Paul Scott Wilson suggests that one way to preach a good sermon is to divide it into four pages. One page about trouble in the world today, one about trouble in the Bible, one about good news in the Bible and one about good news in the world. And to be honest, I think that is a pretty good approach.

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As I was thinking this week about what to say today, I got caught up more and more in the fact that there seems to be an awful lot of trouble in the world right now. We are teetering on the brink of war; people are dying of starvation and disease. Terrorism can strike anywhere in the world. Entire nations are abused and poorly treated.

We have only to look at our own city to see the complexities of the world on a smaller scale. Political battles just here in Seward range from high profile things such as taxes and our elected leadership to the mundane, such as who should clean the toilets. And we seem to twiddle our thumbs as our educational system is gutted.

The question we need to ask, is what does this mean to us as Christians? What are we to do? It is funny sometimes what people do when they are not sure what is right. Look at Peter, James, and John, the stars of the Gospel today. They see

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something magnificent. They see something wonderful. But they are not sure what to make of it or what to do about it. But they are absolutely sure they should be doing something! And so they fall back to an ancient tradition in Israel. When all else fails, build something. Come to think of it, things haven't changed much. We are still great ones to build things. But of course as so often happens, it was the wrong thing to do. In fact, in their case, the thing to do was keep their mouths shut for a while!

Sometimes I wonder how much better we, our country, and the world would be if everyone would practice this lesson! Just keeping our mouths shut for a while.

So, what is practical for us now, in this time, and in this situation? Well first and foremost, I know that we must all pray for peace in the world, wisdom for our elected leadership, and guidance for the future.

Second we can pray for mission in the world. Not the old

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way in which teaching western civilization often seemed just as important or even more important than the Gospel. But a new and enlightening mission that teaches people to care for themselves, that educates young people and teaches others that all are equal in God's view no matter what their age, gender, economic status, race or religion. If people really saw others as God does what a difference that would make.

Third, we can accept and acknowledge that we might just have different ways of seeing what is right in the world. And just because our perceptions are different does not make some of us evil and some of us good. We all bring different perspectives, life experiences, and values to our judgment. It makes our judgment no worse nor no better than the next persons.

Finally, we can let our leaders know how we feel about what is going on in the world, particularly the situation with Iraq. Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

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But no matter how you feel about the possibility of war, whether it is right or it is wrong we must turn our primary focus to the Gospel. And one thing we can be very sure of. Living the Gospel is not as easy or as simple as some would have us believe. Living out the faith of Christ in our own life is tough work. It was not easy for the Apostles, it won't be easy for us. Look at how often they got it wrong. Just as sure as they messed it up, we can count on the fact that we will mess it up from time to time as well. And I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing. It proves we are human. It proves we struggle in life. It proves we struggle in our faith. And that is not a bad thing.