

J.D. Ousley
Sermon—3Mar19
Lk. 9
“Unveiled”

In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

Why do people come to Church?

There are many reasons. There are social benefits to coming to church: you can make friends. There is free coffee and tea and snacks at the coffee hour, and there are refreshments to enjoy at church meetings. There is choral music at some services, and contemporary music at other services.

But my own view is that most people come to church because they want to *find God*. That way of putting it might be a little vague. More precisely, they want to be assured that human beings aren't alone in the universe.

They want to sense that there exists an all-powerful, all-loving spiritual Presence who cares for us and who watches over us.

Now one of the main problems with our desire for the divine is that if this God exists, he won't be *visible*. So we won't be able to verify with our eyes that he's truly there, with us.

But this isn't the end of the story. As it happens, our ancestors in the faith discovered that even though God is invisible, he could find ways to reach out to people and make himself known.

Moses, for example, felt God's presence when he received the Ten Commandments. After he came down from the mountain, as our Old Testament Lesson for today says, “the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.” And as our Epistle text also notes, Moses had to veil his face because it shined so brightly in the presence of the people of Israel.

The Gospel lesson today tells a similar story about Jesus appearing in a dazzling form. Moses happens to be in that story, too; the presence of the ancient prophet serves to show the profound link Christ shared with the *God* of Moses.

Jesus then went on to surpass the achievements of Moses and the Old Testament Prophets. Not only did he bring into the world the teachings of the invisible God, but he also showed in his own person the love that is at the heart of God.

Jesus broke through the invisibility barrier. As the Bible says, “No one has ever seen God, [but Jesus] has made him known.”

So much for the theology. Here's a practical goal that you might want to adopt for yourself during this season of Lent—which begins on Wednesday. You can ask yourself, how does Christ make God manifest to me? How does Jesus make the invisible visible?

There are lots of ways that you might answer this question. You might first turn to *the people you love*. They're not perfect. They're certainly not divine! But their kindness and care can bring God to you.

Then there are the stories to be heard about God in *the Bible*. There is a touching detail in today's Gospel about the disciple Peter. He suggests building three shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah to stay in.

Peter didn't realize that Moses and Elijah, for that matter, are appearing in a spiritual vision only--and Jesus himself doesn't need a place to stay on the holy mountain.

Instead of getting lost in details, we can recognize that God is already present in our lives. While we can't see God, we can look for manifestations of the invisible divine. While God remains a Spirit who can't be captured by human eyes, God is still able to show himself to us.

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church serves as the spiritual and administrative leader of our denomination. The current Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry has conceived a plan that he believes will inspire Episcopalians and help to revitalize our church. Bishop Curry says that we should proclaim ourselves, "the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement."

Bishop Curry is right to emphasize Jesus. Episcopalians sometimes need to be reminded that Christian faith is centered on *Christ!*

Our religion's not just about God or the spiritual. Our faith is not simply worship or service to others. An essential element of our religion is our relationship with Jesus Christ—that is, our relationship with the historical Jesus, the man, as well as with the Risen and Ascended Christ, the Son of God.

We can have this relationship without being fundamentalists. For we are seeking Jesus because Jesus makes God accessible.

I realize that "accessible" is a buzz word, these days. We want public events to be "accessible" to persons with disabilities. We want jobs to be accessible to qualified persons from different backgrounds.

But still, it's a good word. For us, Jesus offers *spiritual* accessibility. Jesus told parables that helped people to understand what God is like. The Parable of the Prodigal Son, for example where a father welcomes back his son who has wasted the inheritance he received from his father—this parable showed that God forgives even the most self-indulgent behavior.

God is not only the ruler of the universe. God is a Father whose love for his children can be seen—can be *seen*—in the love that Jesus himself for the people he encountered.

First of all, Jesus *healed* those who were physically or mentally ill. Second, he showed the love of God by *forgiving* sinners in God's name. Third, he *taught* that just as God sustains the birds of the air, and he numbers the hairs on each person's head, so he cares for each of us and all of our needs.

But people don't only come to church to hear this message. They want in some way to *actualize* the message in their lives. We want to become hopeful, for example, as Jesus taught his disciples to trust in the love of God the Father.

The Presiding Bishop says that we need to become Jesus People. And while I'm not entirely comfortable with that term, I certainly want Jesus on my side!

And by the same token, I want to be on Jesus's side! As the baptismal service says so eloquently, in my baptism I have been "marked as Christ's own forever." In that sense, I am certainly a Jesus person. As Christ's own, I have found a way to God.

And now unto that same God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be ascribed as is most justly due all might, majesty, power, dominion, and praise, now and forever. Amen.