

Epiphany Last, Year A, 2014  
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY  
The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

There's a reason  
for the choice of our psalm this week  
and it's all down  
to verse seven:  
"Let me announce the decree of the LORD: \*  
he said to me, "You are my Son;  
this day have I begotten you."

They are words that we recognize,  
words that are echoed  
in our gospel today.

Jesus  
was with  
his closest followers,  
his closest  
friends.

He'd been traveling  
throughout the region of Galilee,  
mostly along the shores of the lake,  
preaching and teaching and healing.  
His twelve apostles  
were with him,  
and the disciples who often followed him,  
and the crowds  
who constantly trailed after them.

But this day  
he chose just three,  
Peter and James and John,  
led them up a high mountain,  
and there in front of them  
was transformed.

And the three disciples were overwhelmed and confused and didn't know what to do,  
and then they heard a voice, a voice from God,  
"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

"This is my Son. Listen to him."

It's one of only two times in the New Testament  
that God speaks audibly -  
and the other one  
is when Jesus  
was baptized,  
with almost the same words.

That time Jesus had come south from Galilee,  
south to the part of the Jordan River  
that was closest  
to Jerusalem,  
only 25 or so miles away  
and even closer to Jericho.  
And he presented himself to John the Baptist  
to be baptized,  
against John's protests,  
and as he came up out of the water  
the voice of God spoke,  
"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

"This is my Son."  
These words  
have wrapped this season of Epiphany,  
from that first Sunday after the Epiphany, when we celebrated  
the baptism of Christ,  
and today, the last Sunday after the Epiphany, when we celebrate the Transfiguration.

The words themselves seem simple,  
a public acknowledgement by God  
of who Jesus Christ.  
Which in itself  
is amazing.  
Think how that sounded  
to people who had been raised  
in a tradition  
where you kept your distance from God.  
Where God was the one who brought blessings  
but also curses.  
Where the summary of your faith reminded you not to risk worshipping  
anyone else.  
Where God  
might love you,

but you  
feared God.

No wonder that when  
the high priest asked Jesus under oath  
if he was the Messiah, the Son of God,  
and Jesus didn't deny it,  
they counted it

as blasphemy.  
To claim  
to be the son of God  
was tantamount to claiming  
that you were God.

No wonder  
that when he heard the words spoken over him  
at the transfiguration  
Jesus told his friends  
to say nothing.

But it wasn't just  
those four words, "This is my Son."

In Jewish tradition  
when one phrase of a psalm was spoken  
the whole of the psalm  
was implied.

And so, those words  
spoken by God over Jesus,  
echoing the words  
of verse seven of Psalm 2  
turn us back to the psalm  
and demand that we ask,  
"what else  
was God saying?"

Psalm 2  
is a prayer, a conversation  
between someone - traditionally it's thought to be the king -  
and God,  
and it has four sections, each of three verses.

The first  
asks the age-old question, “Why?”  
Why God, is the world in such a mess?  
Why do whole nations  
attack the people of God?  
Why don't they pay any attention  
to the one true God?

The second section  
doesn't answer the questions directly.  
It doesn't tell us why.  
Instead  
it suggests  
what God's response to those  
who attack the God's own people  
might be.  
And that response  
is to laugh at them.  
As if they  
could be any threat  
to the one  
who created the earth.  
And in the midst of the laughter  
are some serious words:  
God says,  
“Pay attention. You think  
that you can rebel against me  
and against the leaders I appoint?”

The third section  
is addressed not to the leaders of the nations  
but to the king, God's king.  
And it's here that those words “you are my Son” come in.  
God assures him  
that God is on his side - or perhaps more correctly,  
he is on God's side,  
and that God will make the challenges of the other nations  
seem ridiculous.  
With God's help  
the king can overcome  
all challenges.

The fourth section, by contrast,  
is addressed to the rulers.  
“Listen up! Don’t be stupid.  
You think you are the rulers of the earth,  
but in reality  
it is God in control.  
Pay attention to him,  
honor him,  
submit to him as you God,  
lest he decide  
to respond to your taunts  
and wipe you out.

And then we come to a final verse,  
that sums everything up.  
Happy are they,  
happy are they  
whether challenging nation  
or fearful friend of God  
who take refuge in him.

And taken all together,  
the question that underlies the whole psalm is,  
“Whose side are you on?”

Now we go back to Jesus,  
back to the day of his baptism,  
back to the day of his transfiguration,  
when God declares, “This is my son”.  
And now, in the light of the psalm,  
we know the underlying challenge.

“This is my son: will you choose to be on his side?”

It’s the essence of the gospel.  
God reaches out to us in Christ,  
inviting us  
to be on his side.

And if we say yes,  
we are adopted,  
we become like sons and daughters to him.

But that's not the end.

If we accept the invitation, if we choose to be on God's side,  
it means living God's way.

It means following God's rules.

It means trusting

that God

knows what is best for us

and will lead us that way.

And it means being transformed, being changed, more and more  
to be like Christ.

In other words

it means actually living

as Christ called us to live.

No 'ifs', no 'buts.'

It means loving one another.

It means loving our enemies.

It means forgiving.

It means being generous.

It means serving one another.

It means reaching out with God's good news.

It means talking about Christ with our neighbors and families and friends.

It means putting God first

in everything we do.

Will you be

on God's side?