

ANTICIPATORY RETROSPECT
Sermon for Pentecost Last A-Mt 17:1-9
LPC, 3/2/14

Do you remember the movie *The Sixth Sense*? This movie stars Bruce Willis as a psychologist helping a young boy who “sees dead people.” There is a vital piece of information that is withheld from the viewer until the very end. When this vital information is revealed, the viewer has the urge to watch the movie all over again to see how the scenes would have appeared had this one thing been understood from the beginning.

(If that sounds vague, I apologize. If you’ve seen the movie you know what I’m talking about. If you’ve not seen the movie, I wouldn’t want to spoil it should you ever see it.)

My point is that there are many things that are only understood in retrospect, when all has been revealed. Many of us experience this in our own lives. There are episodes in our lives of profound illness or sorrow or hardship that cause us, at the time, to ask, “Why, God?” or even “What have I done for you to punish me like this?” Only looking back afterward do we see the blessing.

I know a man who was fired from his job and went through an almost suicidal depression. But the job had been killing him. Moving on created all kinds of freedom and opportunities for both him and his family. I know a woman who didn’t get a job for which she had interviewed and thought she really wanted. But shortly afterwards she had an educational opportunity that really gave her new life, both freedom and opportunities. I know people who have almost died from illness, but emerged with a joyful gratitude for life that transformed them, in freedom and opportunities.

Those are all happy-ending stories. Some things are destined to remain mysteries in this life. For example, I still don’t entirely understand why my first assignment out of seminary made me so unhappy. However, I survived, and I am here, where I am happy, and that is enough. I don’t have to understand everything. Sometimes I know I am called to withhold judgment until I know more.

There is one thing I do know, or rather, there is one thing I believe, and that is that redemption happens. Another way to say this is that I believe in resurrection. I believe that resurrection is what happened to Jesus, and I believe what Jesus says about resurrection for the rest of us.

I don’t understand resurrection, and I don’t have to. I just know I am called to behave as if I believe in resurrection. And there are many things I won’t understand until I too experience resurrection.

That is indeed is part of what we can learn from today’s story of Jesus’ Transfiguration. Significantly, this event takes place soon after the disciple Peter has

The Very Rev. Cynthia Byers Walter

acknowledged that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Peter believes in Jesus as Christ, but does not understand what this means. The fact that Peter does not understand is shown by the fact that when Jesus reveals that he must go to Jerusalem and face death, Peter tries to dissuade Jesus. I don't know whether you remember that particular incident, but Jesus has to rebuke Peter rather sharply for that. And this is right after Jesus has blessed Peter and declared that he is the rock upon which Christ's church will be built!

Peter gets it, but not all of it. His understanding is incomplete this side of the Passion and Resurrection.

When Jesus is transfigured on the mountaintop, shining like the sun and appearing with Moses and Elijah, Peter seems to think this is the climax of Jesus' ministry. He wants to build a shrine right there. But Peter is wrong. Though the Transfiguration prefigures Christ's glory, it is not Christ's glory. In a weird sort of way, the cross is Christ's glory. But this cannot possibly be understood this side of the Resurrection.

There are things we cannot understand except through the Resurrection. The Transfiguration cannot be understood this side of the Resurrection. The Cross cannot be understood this side of the Resurrection.

Until Resurrection happens, there are many things we will not understand. We may think we understand them, like Peter, but we may only understand them looking back at them, in retrospect, through the filter of Resurrection.

Now, our own resurrections haven't happened yet, except symbolically in the ritual of baptism. So we can't yet look back on our own lives through the filter of our own resurrection. At this point we have only the testimony of Jesus' resurrection, which prefigures and promises our own resurrection. Believing in Christ's resurrection, we anticipate our own.

This leaves us to interpret our own lives, as we go along, in a sort of anticipatory retrospect. We anticipate being able to look back on our lives through the retrospect of resurrection. In a way, we bring eternity to bear on our temporal lives. It's a very time-and-space-bending way to look at life. I think, however, this is part of the eternal life promised us by Christ. And it opens up all kinds of freedom and opportunities.

We are baptized Christians. We are here in church. We believe that Jesus is Christ. We get that. But like Peter, we don't get all of it. We won't understand completely this side of resurrection.

There are some things about which we are called to suspend judgment until we know more. In the meantime, we are called to live in anticipation of understanding everything through the filter of resurrection: in anticipatory retrospect... in freedom and opportunity.