

## “Pay Attention Until Morning Comes”

Rev. Don Childers, Los Alamos, NM

February 3, 2008

2Peter 1: 16-21

The church liturgical calendar this Sunday marks the end of the season of Epiphany. “Epiphany” means those times in which God breaks into our experience. The season began just after Christmas with the story of the baptism of Jesus and the voice of God proclaiming that Jesus was God’s beloved son. The season ends with the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain (referred to in our text) and the voice of God proclaiming once again that Jesus is God’s beloved son.

-1-

One constant in life is that things change. Change is perceived differently by different persons. For some the changes are exciting and open up new possibilities. For others the changes are less than exciting, even threatening and close off old possibilities.

This week I received an email that illustrates this point. The email begins with the phrase, *“just in case you weren’t*

*feeling too old today, this will certainly change things.”<sup>1</sup>*

The email points out that the staff at Beloit College in Wisconsin puts together a list to try to give the faculty a sense of the mindset of the year's incoming freshmen. Here is the list for this year:

*The people who are starting college this fall across the nation were born in 1989. They are too young to remember the space shuttle blowing up. Their lifetime has always known about AIDS, the CD was introduced the year they were born, they have always had an answering machine, they have always had cable, they cannot fathom not having a remote control, Jay Leno has always been on the Tonight Show, they do not care who shot J.R. and have no idea who J.R. even is.”*

Generations change and with the march of time situations and circumstances change. Things had changed by the time the author of 2Peter wrote his letter.

---

<sup>1</sup> Email sent from G.Strickfaden ([buffalotours@att.net](mailto:buffalotours@att.net)) received on January 30, 2008.

Second Peter was not written by the person who wrote First Peter. The short version is that no matter what the text may say, Peter did not write this letter. It has a different style, language and setting than First Peter. This was something recognized early on by the Church Fathers. The author of this letter is aware of a corpus of Paul's letters that has been accepted as having authority; is aware of at least one gospel; and is aware of the Letter of Jude. These facts alone place this letter at the end of the First Century or early in the Second Century long after the death of Peter. Now perhaps within the letter is some first person material from Peter or perhaps not. It was not uncommon in that day and time for a student to write something in the name of one's teacher. This would be unacceptable today but we always have to be careful of applying the standards of today to the past. In that time such a thing was seen as honoring the one who taught you.

The author of this letter was a Christian, was Greek, and had Jewish background. He or even she lived at the end of

the First Century long after the deaths of most of the apostles. It was another time and another age. The author of the letter was reacting to some of the current teaching within the church that he felt was not only incorrect but dangerous.

The death of the apostles caused many Christians to rethink the idea of the return of Jesus. The apostles and in particular Paul believed that Jesus would return before that generation passed away. When this did not happen many began to rethink that idea. Some, such as this author, continued to believe that Jesus would return but the date was unknown. Others, apparently, abandoned the idea of the Second Coming as being simply “untrue” or “myth”.

Furthermore, some were questioning parts of the moral and ethical teachings of the church again reacting to the fact that the apostles had been wrong about the return of Jesus and perhaps they were also wrong about some other things as well.

The author’s arguments are not that impressive. He falls back on what so many do when challenged. He

threatens those who differ with punishment by God. He claims that he has the only valid interpretation---the only real understanding because his message comes directly from God. In Eugene Peterson's translation the verse reads, *"The main thing to keep in mind here is that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of private opinion. And why? Because it's not something concocted in the human heart."*<sup>2</sup> In other words the author is not speaking opinion but the words of God.

In our time when so many claim to have a "word" from God and their "word" is "THE" word this argument style has some shortcomings. However, underneath this particular situation is something that I believe does speak to us today and can give us some guidance in today's confusing religious world.

-3-

Second Peter makes a direct reference to the Transfiguration experience that is recorded in Matthew,

---

<sup>2</sup> The Message, by Eugene Peterson. Copyright 1993, 1994, 1996, 2001, 2002 by Navpress.

Mark and Luke. According to Matthew this was a moment of inspiration and transformation for the disciples who accompanied Jesus to the top of the mountain. There they heard the voice of God and that voice transformed everything. They were instructed not to tell anyone about it. This is curious until we recognize that sometimes an experience is best left unexplained.

The author of Second Peter refers to how the voice of God speaks to our hearts. His words are: *“You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises IN your Hearts.”*

The Transfiguration experience and the author of Second Peter operate under the assumption that God is involved in life, works through life, and reacts to life. The author of Second Peter acknowledges that Jesus is a gift that is experienced rather than a gift we understand just through doctrine. People have “seen the light” and heard the voice of God. Second Peter asserts according to Bruce Epperly, *“that*

*all prophecy, including words from the heaven at the transfiguration of Jesus, occurs as a result of the movements of God's spirit."*<sup>3</sup>

In fact throughout the scriptures we have an image of God speaking and then creation happens, of God moving and prophets responding, of God coming among us and bringing us spiritual healing. There is a part of God that must be experienced, not just talked about.

Fred Craddock, who is a New Testament teacher and well-known preacher, wrote in Christian Century several years ago that every attempt to explain the Transfiguration actually trivializes the Transfiguration. There are just some things, Craddock relates, that we must let stand alone.

Epiphanies are those moments in life when God breaks into our lives or into the world. The stories can be analyzed and analyzed to their detriment. Yet, such experiences, many of them very personal, are both treasured and are in fact like a light shining the darkness of hearts.

---

<sup>3</sup> Commentary by Bruce G. Epperly, February 3, 2008, "Process and Faith".  
<http://www.processandfaith.org>.

When I think of my religious experiences I can name several times in which I have felt the presence and voice of God. When I find myself sharing that story, especially using it for a sermon illustration, the experience loses something. It is very difficult to find the words to correctly convey or capture an experience of God.

Epiphanies are “wow” moments. They come to us individually or to the world or to the church at unpredictable times. They are to be treasured, celebrated, and allowed to enter and shine within our hearts.

The author of Second Peter was obviously inspired by the story of the transfiguration and by other unnamed experiences he had had with God. Stories, such as the Transfiguration has inspired painters, writers, preachers, musicians and poets.

Ann Kristin Haldors Fontaine shares the following poem inspired by the transfiguration story:

**Tiny star  
Of morning  
Born in the  
Smallest of stables**



**Spreading from manger  
To shepherd  
To magi  
To beloved  
To teacher**

**Expanding out  
Into the universe.  
Calling everyone and everything  
Home to the heart of love.**

**Transfiguration reveals  
What was always there:  
A supernova exploding  
Into our hearts and minds.**

**Now we feel the black hole  
Tugging pulling dragging us  
Into that heart  
In our journey through Lent  
To the fullness of Easter.**

What a beautiful poem inspired by the story of the  
Transfiguration.

God moves in our lives and within the world and the  
challenge for each of us is to develop the eyes to see and the  
ears to hear.

The two arrived at the farmer's pond and soon fishing  
lines were in the water. Johnny got the first strike, a small

catfish. By noon, however, Johnny was bored. Fishing was fun for a time but it can be so boring.

Johnny's father was immersed in the task of fishing. Like all such tasks he became totally focused on the immediate goal of catching as many fish as he could. He tried to talk to this son. "Son, you need to learn some patience," he said. "Son, you need to learn to stick to the task until it is finished," he said. The father expressed his disappointment in his son for being so restless.

His advice fell on deaf ears. So Johnny's father finally expressed what we often say when frustrated. He said to his son, "Why don't you go and find something else to do so I can enjoy what I am doing."

So Johnny, freed from having to fish, scurried off to explore. Soon he was lost in the wonders of the world. He saw the birds flying, the colors of the flowers and then he saw something moving. Looking closer he saw that it was a TURTLE!!! It was a small turtle, sort of a brownish turtle that was slowing walking toward the pond.

Johnny got right down on his hands and knees and watched the turtle. He studied it from all angles. He tried picking the turtle up and turning it around. But it would just slowly return to its previous course.

It was now time to go home. Quickly Johnny reached down and picked up the turtle. Running to his father he showed it to him and related the exciting day he had had. They decided to take the turtle home as the turtle turned out to be the only significant thing that they had caught all day long.

“We found a turtle!!!” Johnny’s dad reported to his wife. She went out briefly, looked in the little box that was now in the garage and left. She went to Johnny’s room and he excitedly said, “We found a turtle!!!”

“I know”, his mother said matter of factly. Johnny briefly told her the story of the turtle. His mother said, “That’s nice, but now it is time for you to get ready for bed. Go and get ready!”

Johnny was frustrated. He looked at his mother, paused, and said to her, “Mom, All I want is for you to say, WOW”

His mother thought for a moment and then smiled and said, “WOW!!”

Sometimes in the midst of our doctrines, policies, programming, money raising, budgeting, preparations, we forget something important. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in the things of life that we forget the “wows” of life. Sometimes we get so concerned about our career, or paying the bills, or raising the children, or getting through school, or preparing for retirement, that we forget to stand back, look at God, listen for God, and then say “Wow”.

Epiphanies may lead us to theological insight, practical knowledge, and a deeper faith. But at the heart of all such experiences---at the heart of the person who wrote Second Peter----at the heart of those who witnessed the transfiguration---at the heart of those of us who have felt

God and know how God intertwines with life----sometimes it is best just to pause and say nothing but “Wow”. WOW.