

Year B, February 11, 2018
Last Epiphany
Christ Church, Mexia

The last Sunday in Epiphany focuses on the Transfiguration of Jesus, a story with which you are undoubtedly familiar. Jesus goes up a mountain with Peter, James and John; Jesus and his clothes become dazzling white and he is joined by Moses and Elijah. Well today, I'm going to throw you a slight curve-ball and suggest something different. But first, I have to set up the pitch, so to speak.

Let me begin with this story from *God's Will: You Can Know It* by Leslie and Bernice Flynn: "Then there's the example of Christians who use the open window method in seeking God's will. You put your Bible by a(n) (open) window and (whew!) the pages blow and you put your finger on a verse. (and that gives you God's will for you.) One man did that and pointed to the verse, "Judas went and hanged himself." Not a very good life verse, and he did it again. This time he put his finger on the verse that said, "Go and do thou likewise." (Whoops, this can't be God's will for me. So, the) third verse he found said, "Whatsoever thou doest, do quickly." Therefore, I should caution you against using this method to discern God's will.

I have in my lifetime heard God's will seemingly distorted at times, often by well-intentioned Christians. For example, people have frequently attributed some bad thing that has happened, like the death of a loved one or the destruction of a home by a hurricane, as God's will. If that were true, what are the implications for God? - I don't believe that my God wills bad things to happen to people, whoever they may be or regardless of what they have done or not done. I believe that God's will for us is to have an abundant life, a good life. But evil exists in God's creation and sometimes evil impacts God's intention for us.

During the air battle for Britain in WWII and after his church, City Temple in London, was reduced to rubble, the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead preached a series of five sermons to aid his congregation make sense of the carnage to which they were being exposed. These sermons were published in a wonderful little book entitled, *The Will of God*. I highly recommend this book to all of you. It is less than 100 pages, but it contains some of the most powerful inspiration I have ever encountered.

Basically, he saw the term "the will of God" being used to cover what he posits as three separate cases: the intentional will of God; the circumstantial will of God; and the ultimate will of God. He begins by asking if you think it

was God's intention, from the beginning, that Jesus should die on the cross? If so, what does that say about God as a father? Weatherhead professes that Jesus came with the intention that men, and women, should follow him, not kill him. In other words, the intentional will of God was discipleship. However, because of the evil that existed in the world, Jesus was compelled either to stay and die or flee. So, in those circumstances, and only because of those circumstances, the circumstantial will of God needed to be that of letting Jesus go to the cross. Now the ultimate will of God is fulfilled, in part, by us being here today. The death of Jesus on the cross, caused by evil, does not defeat the original intention of God. So God's will is done not in spite of the cross, but because of it. Thus, the evil of man can temporarily defeat or deflect the intentional will of God, but ultimately God works everything for good. And we should always remember and believe that God's will for us is always in our best interest. God loves us!

Now let me return to the transfiguration - but before I do, let me encourage you once again to read Weatherhead's book. I even thought I might preach his sermons on the first five Sunday's in Lent, but then I would most likely violate copyright laws.

The transfiguration occurs in the first century AD/CE, of course. Elijah lived in the 9th century BC/BCE. Moses, if he lived at all because there is some thought now by Bible scholars that he may have been a legendary figure rather than a historical figure - didn't see that one coming, did you? watch for the curve-ball. Anyway, Moses would have lived somewhere between the 15th and early 12th centuries BC/BCE. While these are well-known names, especially among Jews, of the first century there were certainly no photographs of them, and I know of no artistic renderings of their likenesses during that time period. So, how would people have been able to recognize them some 9-1500 years later, if they did see them? Hold that thought for a moment.

Now the concept of the Trinity, one God in three persons, was not mentioned in theological writings until early in the 2nd Century and wasn't developed fully until the 4th century AD/CE. Therefore, Jesus' disciples and the authors of the gospels would not have been thinking about this concept then. So, when first century Jews report seeing two "people" talking with Jesus on the mountain top in a dazzling display of light, who would they most likely infer that they were - Elijah and Moses, of course. Two of the most revered figures of Judaism.

But if Weatherhead is correct about the intentional will of God for Jesus having to be changed because of the circumstances existing in Israel during the first century, maybe what Peter, James and John witnessed was a

conference of the Trinity about how the game plan needed to change. Now, I don't believe it matters who was there, but if you consider these two things together, doesn't that make sense? Something to think about... The transfiguration and dazzling light would be consistent with being in God's presence per some other Biblical reports. It would help us to know that God is immanent (here with us) rather than transcendent (far away - in heaven, for example). Such an interpretation could even support the theology of the Trinity.

Well, I may be straying into heresy. And, I know, the author of Mark does record in Chapter 8, prior to the verses about the transfiguration that we read today, that Jesus told his disciples he must die and be raised up in three days. But we are talking about "6 days" according the author. So, that could be that the author got these stories out of sequence, because he was writing much later and probably didn't know Jesus personally. Or Jesus could have already known the change of plan and maybe the mountain top conference was to explore other options or to reassure the "team" or Jesus that everything would be alright in the end. Again, not a big deal, but maybe such an interpretation helps to support the thoughts of Weatherhead about God's will. And his thoughts can help us understand better why bad things sometimes happen to good people. And those thoughts, I believe, can be comforting.

So be comforted that God loves you, wants only good things for you, and will be with you even though evil may temporarily afflict you and God's will for you.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit. Amen