

Mark 9:2-8 and Hebrews 3:7-19
“God fully revealed in Jesus Christ”

You may not have heard the name Jessie Diggins before a week ago, you may not even today know who that is. Jessie Diggins is an American Olympic athlete, a cross country skier, who before the Olympics had broken a number of ribs but determined to continue her quest to compete. When she started the 6 mile cross country race she was already in a lot of pain, and she said that she found herself “skiing out of my body”. She ended up winning the bronze medal falling to the ground screaming in pain and agony, but finishing on the podium.

Now most of us would have taken stock of our physical shape and said nope, that isn’t going to happen, and anyone would have understood that because of her bruised ribs she didn’t compete, but she persevered and refused to back down even in the face of it, knowing that it would be over, with no guarantee of winning anything, but still knowing that soon this would be over. She had a clear goal in mind with no promise of how it would end, but assured that it would be painful and difficult, and in the end she ended up with a medal.

Both of our Scripture today point to the church focusing on the goal of what is ahead by listening to the promises of God, not getting wrapped up in the pain, the struggle, even the apathy in which it might find itself in the present. But pushing past that it is called to focus on that which is never changing and which provides the eternal promises that secure our future. When we know that God is fully revealed in Jesus Christ then we can rely on his words and his direction to cross the finish line. Let’s read.

READ

50 years ago Woody Allen came out with a play called simply god. It was a play about the different Greek gods interacting with people here on the earth and in the play at a certain point they were to come down from the sky. As they were coming down one of them, in the play, gets tangled up in the wires that brought them down and he ends up being hanged live during the play. The actors as you can imagine are mortified, but not wanting to break the play they begin to ad lib and one of them shouts out: God is dead! The play ends in a way that it wasn’t originally supposed to in a way that was tragically brought to a close.

Today we are celebrating the day of the Transfiguration, which is the Scripture that we had read to us in Mark. Jesus gathers his inner circle, Peter, James, and John, and they go up a mountain and Jesus becomes dazzling white with Moses and Elijah around him as well. Now

this is not the beginning of his ministry, but the disciples had already been told over and over again who Jesus is, and what is going to happen to him.

The plan that he has laid out for them should be clear. He has told them I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. There is not other plan, there is not other path that you have to take, so just stay true to me, believe in me, and you will make it through no matter how painful and difficult it will be, you will make it through so keep your eyes on me. Jesus is God fully revealed to them, and they should know it and take comfort in that.

But Peter feels like things are going awry, that he has to ad lib and start to make things up because no army is being built up by Jesus, those in power aren't doing Jesus' bidding, in fact it seems like things are starting to spin a bit out of control. So he has a plan, let's build some tents so that the Elijah and Moses can help us out when things get really tough. He isn't the first who feels like he needs to ad lib and make things up on his own when God's plans aren't exactly going, well, to plan. Remember Aaron and Miriam when Moses was up on the mountain? Yeah, not really sure when he is going to come down, so hey, let's ad lib a bit, and let's build a golden calf and see what happens. Maybe our ending will be better than God's. I know that God's ending is the promised land, but maybe we can get there quicker and without suffering and pain.

But in the transfiguration, after Peter makes his plan, God comes back to us and says the phrase that cuts through the generations and applies to us as well as we try to ad lib outside of God's plan: listen to him. It really is that simple. Jesus is God fully revealed, so all we have to do is listen to him, and when we do, then we know that we are following God's plan, as confusing as the present may seem to us.

When we get to the ending of Hebrews 3 we find the church community facing indescribable pain and suffering. This is something that is different from Jesus' day to today, the suffering the church is experiencing is real, and physical, and spiritual, and all those things that you hear about people being killed for their faith, yeah, that's happening here to this community who is hearing sermon preached to them that we call Hebrews.

These verses that we read today are taken almost directly from Psalm 95, you see the quotation marks, that's from Psalm 95. This Psalm speaks directly to the when the Israelites were led out of Egypt where they were slaves by Moses and making their way toward the promised land. We know what happens there. In vs.9 we read that they saw all the works that

God did for them during this journey. The plagues, the parting of the red sea, the cloud by day and the fire by night, the manna, the quail, the water from the rock and on and on. They saw this for forty years, it states, but they still put me to the test. Even more than that, they disobeyed, they turned to evil, they fell away from the faith.

Things were not going as they had planned, so they ad libed, oh it would be better to be back in Egypt, they stopped believing the promises of God about the promised land, or they thought they could get there through an easier path, than the one that Moses was leading them on. The author of Hebrews tells the church of the 1st century, don't harden your hearts, look at vs.8 and 15. Sin, rebellion, turning away from God turns you toward sin, it is that simple.

This is the underlying current of the church throughout the ages. It was true in the first century, and it was happening, and it is true today. There is peril in refusing to believe God's word. We can see the difference between radical faith and distrust and doubt. One responds with faith in the throes of the difficult, and it pushes through, the other demands proof before faith is considered. We know the goal, as a church, and it is that rest that is described in line 3 and 4 in the hymns that we are going to sing: the rest that is promised to us. The promised land for the Israelites, the eternal life that is given to us in Jesus Christ.

It is easy to fall away and be disenchanted with the church. The church in the 1st century was shaken because of affliction and persecution. I think today, our greatest danger is apathy and the inability to answer the question of how is the church relevant to my life in the 21st century? What difference does the church make to me and my family? Instead of persecution, we are facing apathy in the culture and the community. Next Sunday we have preschool Sunday, and I know that is the question that is going to be on the forefront of many. What relevance does what they are doing here on Sunday morning have in my own life?

This is especially true because the promises of God often do not look like they sound, and so the question becomes do we trust a church that we hear verses the one that we see? We hear the Gospel but we see suffering and something else other than what the Gospel ought to represent. So we know the play, we know how it ends. But this play is long, the plot is really complicated with a lot of twists and turns called life that is not clear or easy. As actors, we often forget our lines and so we are often called to pivot and be nimble.

We can lose sight of how it ends because we are so caught up in the present scene, which seems like it will never end. When trouble starts, when the storms of sorrow begin to rage, and

the weeds of failure grow in the gardens, when the valley of death closes in, when the mouth goes dry in the spiritual desert, then we are tempted to ad lib the ending, to trade God's story for one that is happier, easier, more upbeat, safer, less demanding, on that, like Thomas, we can touch and see with our own hands. The church is called to persevere, it needs to persevere.

This writer is worried that the church will falter in responding to God's promises in the face of trials, or in the face of apathy. There is a warning here, do not respond to God in the way that the Israelites did, or the disciples did, when the times are hard. This church will experience hard times, but stay with it. Raise your children here, bury your loved ones here, grow in faith, live out your retirement. But when it gets difficult, and it will, let's stay together and face it head on, together. We've done it in the past and we will continue to do it.

Each generation has an awesome responsibility of standing before the claim of God. We have seen in Hebrews that the fundamental failure was their refusal to believe that God was actually present among them. Just like the transfiguration describes the disciples in the midst of the presence of God and not realizing it in Jesus Christ fully revealed. When we gather for worship, we are rehearsing the play over and over again, now we have to live it and not forget the promises that we have received.

I believe that God acts today, as he did in Jesus' day, as he did in Moses day. There is no lessening of his presence and we are without excuse as we follow the risen Savior. Amen.