

Slide #1

Second Sunday in Lent

2024—02—25 Wilson Loo

Mk8 : 31—38 or 9 : 2—9

May the words of my mouth, the thoughts of my brothers and sisters, be pleasing in God's sight. Amen.

Slide #2 “it is good for us to be here”

In Mark chapter 9, verse 5-7. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, **it is good for us to be here**. Let us put up three dwellings—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah... Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him”.

Slide #3 Lent

Today is the second Sunday in Lent. The church encourages believers to reflect, repent and confess their sins, and to reconcile with God.

Slide #4 Faith Journey

Today's passage in Mark's Gospel is part of a bigger section , stretching from 8:22 to 9:32. If you read the whole section in one go, you will find, as some biblical scholars point out, that Mark is writing about the faith journey of a believer.

First, a blind man asked Jesus to touch him, enabling him to gradually regain his eyesight, from being unable to see anything, to seeing clearly.

Then, Peter's confession, "You are the Christ." In fact, Peter's understanding of Jesus is at best partial at that point. He tried to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem. Jesus had to explain His mission to his disciples, and told them to take up their cross and follow Him.

Then comes the passage on the Transfiguration. Jesus took the three disciples up a high mountain where He was transformed and His glory shone. Prophets Elijah and Moses appeared together with Jesus. Peter had a glimpse of the glory of the kingdom of heaven. He may have been very enchanted by this spiritual experience and wanted to stay. But in the end, he followed Jesus, and returned to his ministry work.

Slide #5 Lent

This group of scriptures on the "Faith journey" is very rich. I hope we can consider using this passage together with Rev. Leung's Lenten series "Introducing the Christian Faith" as a guide to reflect on our relationship with God.

Let's come back to this passage. From first being fascinated by the Good News, to believing it; to continuing to learn, and to reaching a climax in spiritual experience. However, the climax **is not the end**. We must continue to follow the footsteps of Christ.

The whole passage tells of a continuous story. There is no pause in between. Even after "It's good that we are here" Peter and his colleagues pressed on towards the goal.

Slide #6 Push Forward toward the goal

Philip Moxom was a famous American writer and clergyman in the 19th century. In his book "The Aim of Life", he points out that an important distinguishing feature between humans and animals is that humans can live for a goal. **This goal can eliminate the chaos in life and make it clear and powerful.** He encourages readers, especially young people, to **establish their goals**, and work towards a better future.

The apostle Paul, said in Philippians 3:12-14, "...Brothers and sisters, I don't consider that I have taken hold of it yet (referring to the goal) . But here is the one thing I do. I forget what is behind me. I push hard toward what is ahead of me.¹⁴ **I push myself forward toward the goal to win the prize.**"

But remember, "forget what is behind me" refers to Paul's letting go of his previous pride and complacency when he thought he would get salvation by strictly keeping the laws.

It does NOT mean forgetting the past, nor does it mean not cherishing the present. We must make use of past and present experiences to prepare for the future, and to help us make choices that are in line with God's will.

Slide #7 The Past, The Present, & The Future

We have to look back into the past because we have to be **ROOTED** in past experiences. We cherish the present, partly, as Ecclesiastes 5:18 says, "to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun", but equally important is to seek out and retain the good stuff in the eyes of God, and to remove those not to

God's liking. This will allow us to focus on the future and aim straight at the winning pole.

Slide #8 Rooted in the Past

Being ROOTED in the past .

First, we must not let the comfort of the past, hinder us from moving forward. When the Israelites left Egypt, they were complaining in the wilderness, that they had no fish, no vegetable, like when they were slaves in Egypt. In return for their grumbles and lack of trust in God, their journey through the wilderness took them a lengthy 40 years.

Second, do not hang onto things that, in God's sight, are not right. E.g. Apostle Paul, before he was converted, falsely believed that he could rely on keeping the laws to get salvation. He gladly put it down.

Third, do not let the guilt of past wrong doings tie us down. Jesus Christ has already suffered the punishment for our sins on the cross. This has enabled us to be regarded as righteous. Hence, we can and should live without the burden of guilt and can move boldly forward.

On the contrary, what **we need to do** is to learn from our spiritual experience from the past, and use them to help us understand God's will and choose the path ahead. Looking back on the thirty-something years' history of St. E's, I come to realize that God has sent different priests to us at different stages, to set an example for us.

Among them was the lead pioneer who taught us humility; &

The comforter who showed us how to care for people after the church fire,

Then, God send one who showed us how to push forward towards the goal, how to reconcile, and to rebuild,

Followed by one who challenged us to grow spiritually.

Then, there was a period with frequent changes of leadership, enabling St. E to learn to adapt to diverse situations with our wisdom from God.

And all through these years, God has shown us His love and guidance through the support of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, as well as the Anglican family, especially our own parishioners.

Furthermore, the young people of St. E are taking over much of the leadership role. St. E is truly a blessed church.

Side #9 Message from the former Archbishop of Toronto

The Most Rev. Colin Johnson, the former Archbishop of Toronto, wrote in our 20th anniversary memorabilia, I quote,

“ St. Elizabeth’s has had an eventful 20 years, experiencing in a short time what some parishes experience only in several generations, if at all, having gone through a devastating fire, several moves and the ongoing construction of new facility. **Through all of this, St E has continually focused on the centre of our faith, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**” Unquote.

More than ten years have since passed since his message, but Archbishop Johnson’s observation is still very valid. We have a rich history to help us understand what God’s will is.

Slide #10 Cherishing the present

Cherishing the present . Cherishing the present does not mean "being fixated in the present, and refusing any change.

In particular, we must **not** be trapped by sin and be unable to escape from it, like the Israelites in the years leading up to their being conquered and exiled. They continued to stay away from God to worship idols and oppress the poor and meek despite the warning from the prophets

Cherish the present means getting ourselves ready by removing the bad and retaining what is good in the eyes of God, and adding new and appropriate ideas.

I believe this is what Jesus means when he says in Matthews 5:17, " I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them", Jesus Christ did not let the old tradition bind him down, but lived out the spirit of the law and make it shine.

Cherish the present, because now is the time to choose the path we should take: the path that pleases God, or our own path? In order to choose the path that pleases God, of course we must understand His will. In the Old Testament period, the Israelites relied on the Laws and the Prophets. In Jesus' time, people relied on his teaching. Now we rely on the Bible.

Slide #11 Return to the Bible

During the Reformation Movement, Martin Luther called for the church to return to the Bible to understand God's will. We are now in the post-modern era. We emphasize on individuals: personal opinions and personal feelings.

Hence it is even more important to return to the Bible. Nowadays, when we read the Bible, we often focus on "How do "I" understand this passage and how do "I" feel?" This is of course important, but we must not forget the even more significant questions, "What does God want to say in this passage?" "What does God want to say to me?"

Slide #12 The Future

The Future. If "the future", is a total unknown, it would make us confused and lost. If we only know where the destination is, but don't have the guidance of the Holy Spirit or the proper preparation, we would feel helpless and frustrated. Our rich past experiences and our attention to the present will enable us prepare our future, and face it head on without fear, straining toward what is ahead, (Philippians 3:13)

Even from the beginning, God has already had a plan for St. E., and our past history is a good testimony to this. Every time God sent a new priest-in-charge, He opens a new chapter for our church.

First God send a priest to start our church.

After being burnt down, God send one to prepare us to start anew.

Then God dispatch a priest to lead us through the wilderness, into the promised land, rebuild the church, and develop St. E's ministry.

After that He sent another to help us reflect on our spiritual life before the pandemic lockdown.

Then we had several different priests to help us learn about the challenges of the diverse environment.

Now, just as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, God sent a new priest to guide us come out from the lock down and embark on the journey again.

The Lord's ever-present and unfailing guidance IS the best guarantee for the future of St. E.

Nevertheless, even the seeds are in good soil, farmers are still needed to properly irrigate and fertilize them.

Slide # 13 Loving one another, Uniting in one

As Rev. Canon Simon Li said at the Celebration of new ministry service, Rev. Leung, has a fiery heart. At the same time, St. E parishioners are known for their dedication.

Let us pray to our Heavenly Father that we will love one another as He so commands.

Let us pray that we may be united in one, in our Lord Jesus Christ, just as what He has prayed for us.

Let us work together to help fulfill the great commission Jesus Christ has entrusted us, spreading the gospel, caring for the community; and glorifying God and benefitting people . Amen

(1883 words) (12 min)