

II Kings 2: 1-12

Psalm 50: 1-6

II Corinthians 4: 3-6

St. Mark 9: 2-9

Feast of the Transfiguration 2024

“For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.”

II Corinthians 4: 5

Long, long ago, there was an epic battle! On one side of the battle were 450 prophets of Baal, a Canaanite fertility god. On the other side of the battle, there was the prophet Elijah. Elijah has just confronted his fellow country-men:

Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.’ (I Kings 18: 21)

To the Lord God, the Living God, allegiance is to be to him alone. After all, the first of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall have no other gods but me.” That is, there is only room enough in our hearts for *one* ultimate. To serve God is to serve him alone...

Now, for God’s people living near Mount Carmel, it isn’t that they wanted to give up worshipping the God of their ancestors *altogether*... Rather, they wanted to “have their cake and eat it too.” That is, they wanted to worship the Lord God *and* the Baal the local idol. But that option is not open to them – or to us!... We are either serving God or we aren’t. We cannot claim full allegiance to the Creator of the whole universe, and some other god as well... What is it that the prophet Elijah asked? “How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him...”

The epic battle follows. The single faithful prophet Elijah versus the 450 prophets of Baal agree to prepare a sacrifice on an altar – but they weren’t going to light the fire. After worship, whichever G/god came with flame and lit the fire, so the sacrifice could be burned and offered – *that one* is the true God...

The 450 prophets of Baal go first. They prepared the sacrifice of a bull early in the morning, and spend all morning praying for Baal to come... They limped around in a kind of ritual dance and cut themselves, so their own blood was dripping on the sacrifice... But nothing happens... No god answers...

By mid-day, the prophet Elijah has had enough. Elijah mocks the prophets of Baal, suggesting that Baal has gone to sleep or gone on a journey or wandered away (which is a euphemism that their god is delayed by using the bathroom)...

Then Elijah asks the on-lookers to soak the altar and the sacrifice with water 3 times... Of course would make it harder to light and to burn with fire... Then Elijah says a very simple prayer to the Living God of Israel, and pauses... Suddenly, an enormous fire comes down, consuming the offering, the altar, and even the puddles of water being used to drench the sacrifice!... The people begin to shriek, “The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God!”

The prophets of Baal come to a bad end. There could be no doubt that day that the God who is worthy of worship is the Lord God alone; there could be no other...

It was an extraordinary battle which is recorded in First Kings 18. But the point I most want to draw to our attention is that the battle was between allegiance to the Lord God alone; or, to the Lord God *along with* other idols or objects of worship...

Looking back at this ancient culture, there are some who might say, “Oh, how quaint.” Those people long ago were attracted to give devotion to local idols as well as God... But I suggest that the desire to try to accommodate worship to the Living God and other gods at the same time is not confined to the eighth century or so before Christ...

Some of us know the Rev. Dr. Glen Taylor, who until recently served around Eagle Lake, near South River... As a young doctoral student, Glen went on an archeological dig in the state of Israel, examining artifacts from hundreds of years after the conflict recorded in First Kings, yet also long before the birth of the Lord Jesus... In this archeological dig, the number of evidence of worship *within the state of Israel* to all kinds of local spiritual allegiances was absolutely stunning... God’s choice is clear: Him alone; or not him... But we aren’t to try to worship him and others at the same time...

What are the ultimates in many people’s lives today? From drugs to sex to power to a family member to money to self-interest, I suggest that there are idols all around us – and far more people are drawn in than they might realize...

On the first Sunday morning after their historic church building burned almost to the ground, the congregation reminded one another that our first loyalty is to *God*. Gathered near the ashes, they sang an old hymn,

All to Jesus, all to Jesus, this our song shall ever be;
For we have no hope, nor Saviour, if we have not hope in thee.

Where are our priorities? Who is our ultimate? My friends, I suggest that there are lots of wonderful things in life. But our first priority is to be oriented to God, in all his splendour...

Today, we are nearing the end of the season of Epiphany. To finish it off, we are encouraged to reflect on the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus... Many of us know the story very well: Jesus goes up a mountaintop with a few disciples, and then they see Jesus Christ in extraordinary splendour, dazzling with beauty and light! Moses and Elijah, representing the Law & the Prophets, join him, for Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the ancient plan of God – revealed through the Law and the Prophets...

The Transfiguration of Jesus was not a change into something new – rather, it was a *revealing* of who Jesus Christ is – who he has been, all along!... Those first disciples, and us, are learning even more deeply that the person of Jesus is full of the very nature of God, in all his beauty and glory. Devotion is to be to the Lord...

This coming Wednesday, we will begin observing a new Church season, the season of Lent. I invite us all, in our pilgrimage toward Easter weekend, to take time for self-examination; for deeper commitment to our Saviour; may we also be prepared to leave behind the any idols or temptations, which lurk under the surface, and which can be so tempting. (The object of temptation always looks good at the time...) May we learn how to take on all that is godly, and to renounce anything which can draw us away from the love of God, for our sakes, and for God's greater glory.

Amen.