

Transfiguration Sunday

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

Whenever someone climbs a mountain or when a cloud shows up in the Bible, you better pay attention. Something is going to be revealed about God.

In our first lesson, Moses receives the 10 commandments from God on Mount Sinai. In our Gospel, Jesus is transfigured (metamorphosis in Greek) on a mountain surrounded by Peter, James and John when they hear the voice of God in a cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him."

I had a mountain top experience once when I was hiking and fly fishing with my brother, Steve, in Glacier National Park... pre-marriage. We decided to hike 7 miles up to some glacial lakes in order to do some fishing and camping. Steve was in better shape than me at the time and he wanted to go faster than I was capable. Being the prideful person that I am, I tried to keep up with him. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way into the trip I hit the wall. I started to become dehydrated and a bit delirious. We stopped and rested a while... ate and drank. It is in that moment I had clarity. I decided right then that I wanted to ask Jeranna to marry me. I couldn't wait to call her from Kalispel. I asked her, "What would it take to marry you?" She said, "You need to meet my family and ask my dad's permission." And the rest is history.

Peter obviously had a mountain top experience here. He is basking in the glory of Jesus' amazing transformation on the mountain. He knows something awesome is happening here. Many scholars believe the transfiguration is a foreshadowing of Jesus' resurrection at Easter. What a beautiful image... Jesus transfigured into a bright and shining figure... joined by the heroes of the Hebrew Bible... Moses and Elijah.

Peter knows it is good to be there. He is ready to go to Menards and get supplies for three dwellings, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus so he can keep coming back to that very place for

worship. He wanted to make a shrine to remember this moment. He wanted to stay there. But right in the middle of that thought, he is interrupted by God's voice from heaven, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Matthew tells us "When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear."

What were they afraid of?

Of the voice coming from the cloud?

Or of the command to listen to Jesus? Were they not listening to Jesus?

Perhaps, because earlier in the Gospel, every time Jesus predicted his passion... that he must suffer and die and in three days rise again, the disciples wanted none of it. Suffering and death were not a part of the equation for their idea of a messiah. They were not listening or comprehending Jesus' words. They were afraid.

Fear has a tendency to paralyze us. What do you fear?

For the disciples, when they were paralyzed by fear, Jesus came up to them and touched them and spoke a word to them, "Get up and do not be afraid." They got up and went down the mountain with Jesus where they will continue to learn from Jesus that his true glory isn't found in that moment of transfiguration. He still has a journey to complete. He needs to head down the mountain. Jesus' journey will go through the cross. In other words, Jesus will not just be identified with times when things go well, but in suffering and loss as well.

This is such good news to me. God is present with me when I fail, or when I suffer, or when life is overwhelming. God isn't present only in my successes.

In this Transfiguration story, the baton of scripture is being passed from Moses, who represents the law the Torah in the Bible to Elijah, who represents all the prophets, to Jesus, who is now the fulfillment of all scripture. We are left alone with Jesus.

To me, this story of transfiguration has deep implications on how we understand scripture. All of the law and prophets must now be read through the lens of Jesus Christ. They must be interpreted through the great commandments to love God and love the neighbor as yourself.

In fact, in Matthew 22, Jesus says, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

I witnessed this love this week in a visit to Bill Dull, one of our homebound folks. I went to his room but he wasn't there. I went to the commons area and there he was calling Bingo. He was good at it. One woman kept calling out Bingo after Bill would call a number. She may have had some memory loss. Regardless, Bill listened to her call out the numbers every time. She always thought he called B11. He graciously let her down and went on. It was beautiful to witness.

Jesus' word to us today is also “Do not be afraid.” He touches us today in the Word, music, fellowship, and Holy Communion. Here Jesus gives us his body and blood to lift us from our fears. Jesus' word is life giving.

May you too be transformed by God's Word and God's love. And may you know that Jesus insisted on not basking in his glory on the mountain, but came down with us in mind.