

Transfiguration A

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 2

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9

Rev. Trish Schmermund

Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Edmonton

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Grace and peace to you from Jesus who loves us.

It's one of those stories when we say – wouldn't it be nice to have been there! To see such a sight! Oh my! Or, on the other hand, maybe not! We can also imagine that it was at least a little bit scary! It sort of reminds me of our "Ponder That" Group who is inviting us to ponder what it would be like to interview God... or on second sober thought, would you really want to?

At any rate, this is the story by which all other "mountain top" experiences are measured. The disciples had already come to realize that ministry was difficult and challenging work. Not only did they travel on foot across the land, but they encountered a variety of people, some who welcomed them, some who were hostile, some who wanted to join the following and some who despised the changes Jesus brought. In following Jesus, the disciples were challenged too in the deep roots of their history – challenged to rethink centuries of teaching and practice. I can only imagine how that drained them emotionally, physically and intellectually.

Jesus understood this, it took a toll on him too. That's why we hear of him periodically wandering off into the wilderness or wanting to be alone so that he could pray and regroup, ready for another day of ministry. Going up the mountain, was one of those moments.

Now, just before the Transfiguration story, Jesus had been asking his disciples about how they saw him, did they see him as the Son of Man (or we might say Son of God)? It might not sound like a big question to us, but then it was. If one affirmed Jesus as the Son of God, that had all kinds of implications for both the Jewish community and the Roman. It was extremely daring to declare anyone to be God's Son for the Israelite people, and for Rome, Caesar was considered god of the people.

But here's what happened just prior to the Transfiguration (16:13b-16):
[Jesus asked] "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Peter's declaration is quite remarkable. And very daring. In that statement he is moving away from his heritage, from everything he had learned from his family and ancestors. Then, in a quick turn of events, Jesus teaches that being the Messiah means he will die. And Peter? He quickly backs up, unable to compute Jesus = Messiah = death. "I'll never let that happen!" He exclaims.

It's helpful to understand what was going on just before the Transfiguration. It helps, I think, to see the necessity of this little guys trip to the mountains. With all the mental acrobatics, new things to learn and experience, they needed a break, time away, confirmation of Jesus' identity. And so, Jesus leads them up the mountain, away from the stress and strain of all they were experiencing, away from distractions, away from questions and doubts.

If Peter, James and John had any doubts about their newfound faith or who Jesus is, the Transfiguration washed them away. Perhaps most importantly, it helped them to see that Jesus wasn't *competing* with the giants of history (they weren't in fact giving all that up!) but was part of it, he was a continuation of it. There Jesus stood, flanked by the ancient pillars, Elijah and Moses (it doesn't get any bigger than that folks!) And notice that the voice from heaven echoes God's proclamation at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" I think we'd all be paying attention at that moment!

In Matthew's gospel this story is a turning point. It's the pivot point between Jesus' ministry in Galilee and the surrounding area – to – Jesus setting his sights on Jerusalem where he will die. From this point onward in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has his sights set on Jerusalem and his Passion. The vision set the record straight about who Jesus is and what he came to do – to chart a new course for all people that was founded on peace, love, compassion and community.

For many of us, the pivot point is our baptism. Yes, we too come upon various turning points in our lives, times when we are asked to change course, to believe, to take a chance, to dare to *not conform* to the world's expectations. As God's people we are called to point all our efforts toward those same directions Jesus did. We too go to "Jerusalem" (in spirit) when we let go of worldly pursuits in favor of those that bring people together, that bring equity, that care for those who struggle, that proclaim justice.

As we baptized Tanner this morning (and he doesn't even know it yet!) he is now part of a long history and lineage. Knowing he is loved and accepted will enable him to grow and learn supported by Christ and the family of God. Certainly, he, like any of us, will make mistakes along the way, but each becomes its own transfiguration moment, where we remember who and whose we are.

When you have those moments of doubt or shame or disappointment, think back to this story, to the power and presence of Christ. Imagine yourself alongside of Peter, James and John; see yourself in the presence of Jesus – I'm sure you will gain a new and meaningful understanding of your life.

And when you have those moments of pride or joy or arrogance, think back to this story, to the power and presence of Christ. Imagine yourself alongside of Peter, James and John; see yourself in the presence of Jesus – I'm sure you will gain a new and meaningful understanding of your life.

Children of God you are. Whether you climb the mountain or walk the plain, if you wander downtown corridors or venture into your neighbourhood – you are an important part of your own heritage. Don't be afraid, step out, Jesus is with you. Amen.