

Transfiguration Happens

Mark 9:2-9

Grace Lutheran Church

2/14/21

For what seemed like the first hour of our hike....we were not even sure if we were on the trail or not....snow had blanketed the landscape and so...also hidden the trail from our view..... and made it difficult at times to discern whether we were even going the right direction or not.... Eventually we found some animal tracks...and began to follow those markers...laid out for us so kindly by our non-human companions... and did meander our way to a trail marker...and then we...knew we were on the right path...And...we continue to travel up the mountain...Deer Mountain....just outside of Estes Park....in the heart of Rocky Mountain National Park....in Colorado. If you've ever been there...or somewhere like it...you know...especially for us...midwest folks...the mountains can be absolutely stunning....breathtaking....even...awe-inspiring... And...this hike...up Deer Mountain was no exception.... Every twist and turn...ever upward was met with exclamations like..."Oh my gosh...check out that view...." or "Look this way....Wow!".....finally...after hours and miles of hiking....we got near the mountain top...greeted with beautiful views of the Rocky Mountains...the continental divide....so amazing....we couldn't help but take out our phones....and take some pictures to share....but not even those would come close to doing it justice... It was one of those *mountain top* experiences if I do say so myself! I'm sure the thought crossed my mind...before we made our descent...still up there....
I could stay up here forever....

And...I've had other experiences too....not literally in Colorado....but *mountain top* experiences none-the-less.... That night so many of you have heard me talk about before... on the corner of Addison and Racine....at a Lutheran church on the north side of Chicago....on the Eve of Easter...the Queen of Feasts...The Great Vigil of Easter... a liturgy chalk-full of light and darkness...candles and prayers...fire and incense...singing and stories...oh, the stories....all the orienting stories of our faith....creation and exodus....the fiery furnace....the soaring vision of Isaiah....and then the first Easter proclamation....alleluias galore....baptisms and the first Easter Eucharist....What a night!
I could have stayed there forever.....

We've all had those mountain top experiences....those moments that left us a glow....wanting to hold on....wanting to stay there a little longer... Whether it was in nature....or at camp...whether it was specifically related to your faith....whether it was in worship...or out in the wild.... So many of my mountain top experiences have happened...either outside...hiking or running....or in church....surrounded by the people of God...maybe yours have too...

We've all uttered either outloud...or in our hearts and minds....*I could stay here forever....*

There are Peter, James, and John...up on their high mountain top....not Deer Mountain...But Mount Tabor... having been led there by Jesus....then...all of the sudden...there is Elijah and Moses..with Jesus....it's only Jesus though whose clothes become dazzling white... Peter suggests making three dwelling places..but before much longer...a voice comes from heaven...echoing his baptism....announcing Jesus as the beloved son of God...and only Jesus is there... transfigured before them... revealed....as the Son of God...The God of all with flesh and blood...fully God and fully man....after the terror subsided and they were just in the presence of the glorified Jesus...I'm sure they felt like saying....*We could stay here forever....*

This story ends the way most of our *mountain top* experiences do....My dad and I had to go down Deer Mountain...back to where our car was....the Easter Vigil liturgy ended... camp week was over...the vacation had wrapped up....no matter how transcendent and spiritually fulfilling church services are...eventually we will hear *Go in peace, serve the Lord*...walk out those doors...or during the pandemic... exit out of youtube.....and the disciples had to walk down mount Tabor as well.... These mountain top experiences end....and we have to go down...to the bottom of the mountain....where we live most of our lives....Even if we wish we could *stay there forever.....*

Today is one of those liturgical hinge-points on the church calendar as we end Epiphany and turn our gaze toward Lent....from the many mountain top moments of God revealed in Jesus...to the wilderness...to life here...down below...

And, if you remember...the first Sunday after Epiphany...what image do we get from Scripture/Jesus' life...Baptism....the Baptism of Jesus...

Transfiguration has an echo of Jesus's baptism....the voice from Heaven...proclaims Jesus as God's beloved...just as that same voice did over those waters....And...that bookends our Epiphany season....

The echoes of baptism here...do not just end at Jesus' baptism. See...there is even more echos here to our own... Jesus is dressed in dazzling white....and....we are dressed in the dazzling garments of Christ's very righteousness alone....the voice from heaven speaks over us too....my beloved son, beloved daughter, my beloved child....

And....transfigured in baptism we are prepared....given everything we need for life down the mountain...where most of life is spent...in baptism we are dressed for that descent...that walk down into the wilderness... baptismal backpack filled we can leave those mountain-tops and traverse the world no matter what manner of sin or death we may find on that path....

On that hike at Deer mountain our backpack was packed with the usual...cliff bars, water, you know the drill....

Our baptismal backpacks have been packed with forgiveness of sin, freedom that fits us to serve our neighbors, all the gifts of the Holy Spirit in heaping amounts...the very Spirit of God...which now resides in our hearts....Christ's resurrection life that courses through our veins...and his light that lives in us and illumines our days.....

As we find ourselves at the base of the mountain....headed towards lent....face to face with life here...on the other side of mountain top experiences.... Where things sometimes seem bleak and mundane...where our own sin and the effects of sin in our world seem much more vivid....where hope just seems in shorter supply....where the shadows are more pronounced...down here....where it's easier to tell the truth...about our own propensity to live lives turned in on ourselves... and our participation in injustice....where we'd rather just go back up the mountain...

If we stay here a little longer....and continue to face the direction of Lent...toward Jerusalem...we will see that....This mountain inevitably leads us to the mount of Golgotha, the hill outside the city where Jesus is transfigured again, this time alongside two common criminals and is lifted up on a cross transfiguring an instrument of torture into the very tree of life. And...then three days later...he rises from the dead....dealing the final death to death itself...

So, empowered, saved, defined...by that mountain-top experience...we pick up our backpacks again and realize that having been transfigured in baptism....we shine in the wilderness....the resplandance of God's truth shimmering through us....

At Jesus's transfiguration Peter wanted to build three dwellings....but now....since we have been transfigured....God's dwelling place is where we are....As Lutheran pastor Miriam Schmidt points out, "This is God's work: to shine into our hearts and to make each and all of us baptized children into a holy community, God's own people, a worthy home for God."

Each of us....members of the body of Christ, each of us image bearers, each of us....a dwelling place for God.....A holy people...

We are witnesses to God's presence down the mountain....after whatever we have experienced has ended, after the liturgy is over, and church concludes....and we walk out the door....that is when we take off our backpacks and become living icons of Jesus Christ...revealing him down here....bringing healing to the broken, welcoming the stranger, bringing food to the hungry as we are doing now....when we encourage one another in word and deed....when we support what God is doing outside these walls....when we lift up voices long ignored...when we use our

resources to benefit others....and even as we learn to talk about how God has worked in our lives so we can be equipped to share the good news with our neighbors....We shine....you shine...I see your light...

At cornerstones Wednesday we were talking about what it means to proclaim Jesus...and not ourselves...to a people whose eyes have been blinded by the god of this world...like Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth....and someone mentioned....it's as if we are in a dark tunnel....and we point the flashlight just down at the feet of those we travel with....leading them to the other side....

Sustained by the Spirit.....when we do these things....as transfigured disciples....we sustain one another....and point the way in the wilderness.....Point the way toward life...point the way toward Jerusalem....point the way to the cross...and yes, point the way to that Easter dawn we begin our journey towards this week.....

Even though that hike left me wanting to *stay up there forever*...I knew life was waiting back down the other side....And...so it is for us....down the mountain is where God calls us...and where God works through us.....pointing the way....walking the way..towards life...that will never end....Got your flashlight? How about your backpack? Let's go.