

*"The Transfiguration of the Church"***Opening**

Check-in & Introductions

Gospel Lesson

Mark 9:2-9 (NSRV)

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Sermon Focus

This week's Scripture recounts the story we know as "The Transfiguration." The three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) tell this story, and it is a part of the church's liturgical calendar every year.

Biblical scholars connect the transfiguration story to the resurrection, with some even interpreting it as a post-resurrection story that has been editorially misplaced in the flow of the Gospel. "Transfiguration Sunday" is always the Sunday right before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, and it serves as a kind of ecclesial bookend for the season, with Easter and the resurrection at the other end.

The Transfiguration is a Biblical "mountaintop moment," a point of orientation in which those involved remember and renew their relationship with God. Peter and the others see the fullness of who Jesus is, the fullness of his relationship with God. They see Christ transfigured, conversing with Moses and Elijah, his identity affirmed by a heavenly voice. And it terrifies them.

In his fear, Peter reacts. He is overcome with what he was witnessing, and expresses the urge to hold on to it, to stay in the mystical moment. But mountaintop moments always slip away. God is always doing a new thing. There is always going to be another step along the way when it comes to following Jesus.

After their transfiguration moment, Jesus walks with his disciples back down the mountain. They walk back into their work, back into the valley. However, having experienced the mountaintop, they are now in a different spiritual place altogether. They have encountered God in a more direct way than they ever had before, perhaps. And the experience has oriented them to what they are to do next.

The church still longs for Transfiguration. There is always room to grow; there is always something more we can become. Today's "mountaintops" are meant to inspire the church; we are not meant to stay there. A part of being the church is the hard work to be done in the valley, and it is okay for us to say that out loud.

In order to become the fullness of who God desires the church to be, in order to be transformed into "something more beautiful or elevated" (Suzanne DeWitt Hall), we must allow the Spirit to orient us, equip us, and inspire us to God's mission, lived out in the valleys of the world.

Discussion Questions

- 1) When was your last "mountaintop moment?" What made it significant for you?
- 2) Throughout his story, Peter exhibits significant growth in his relationship with Jesus. In what ways has your Christian discipleship grown? Where in your Christian discipleship do you think you still need to grow?
- 3) Is church comfortable?
- 4) What does a truly transfigured church look like? Who would be welcome? Whose presence would be truly celebrated?

Prayer

God who moves, God who shines, God who changes us, thank you for the mountaintops. Lord, transfigure your church once again, so that the church might grow into a more beautiful, a more elevated community. Inspire us to head into the valleys to share your love and grace in all we say and do. Amen.

"Mountaintop moments orient us toward the next step in our calling." – Rev. Winter Hamilton