

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

*"In Awe"*

## Sermon Reflection Notes

The story of Jesus' transfiguration is a story that cannot easily be conformed to fit the contours of our own experiences. Rather, this extraordinary story is one that leaves us in awe of its mystery and power, and in awe of the presence of God. It is a story that echoes the story of Moses on Mt. Sinai (*Exodus 24*) where Moses met God in the cloud, received the ten commandments, and his face shined after being in the presence of God. It is a story that echoes the story of Jesus' baptism (*Luke 3*) where God appeared in the form of a dove, and in a voice that proclaimed Jesus to be God's Son, beloved, and sent in ministry among God's people. The dazzling brightness of the transfigured Jesus will be recalled also in *Acts 26:13* when Luke describes Saul's experience of the risen Jesus appearing in "a light from heaven, brighter than the sun."

This week's scripture describes the moment when Jesus, on top of the mountain to pray with Peter, James, and John, is transformed before their eyes. His face changed, his clothes began to glow, and then Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah. Can you imagine? Peter certainly couldn't since he began to babble about how 'good' it was to be there and maybe they needed tents. But before Peter could even finish, God interrupted and echoed the same words that were uttered when Jesus was praying after his baptism: "This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Do what he says." The addendum "Do what he says" suggests that God recognizes that we, as well as the disciples, might do our own thing unless we are told to do what Jesus says; and maybe we would do our own thing. Maybe we do. We probably need the reminder.

Pastor Ron said he wonders every year what the point is of the transfiguration story. It doesn't reveal anything about Jesus that hasn't been revealed before. He suggested that maybe the point of the story is its awesomeness. Pastor Ron pointed out that Matthew's version of this story says that Peter, James, and John fell to their faces in awe as God's voice boomed from heaven. But in Luke's gospel, that doesn't happen. In Luke's telling, God spoke and then Jesus returned to his normal dusty, clothes and the disciples and Jesus went about their lives and headed down the mountain. It is then, when they are back with the people, the crowd, that Jesus healed a child who was convulsing from a demon and they "all were astounded at the greatness of God." In Luke's gospel it wasn't the grand displays of divinity that filled people with awe. It was when Jesus healed others, when Jesus saw someone in need and offered healing and comfort.

Matthew and Luke told the same story and shared different ways people found wonder and awe. In their stories, God is the actor, creating beautiful moments that fill the people with awe. God is still at work today, creating awe, creating the feeling we have when we encounter vast,

mysterious things. As we transition out of Epiphany and into Lent, we are invited to find awe in the world around us; we are invited to participate with God in redeeming all things and making them beautiful. Even death is a means of awe. We are dust. But God is making beautiful things out of the dust, and in death, because of Christ, there is life. That is awesome. And all we have to do, is take time to notice and be in awe.

## Scripture

*Luke 9:28-43 (NRSVUE)*

<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. <sup>30</sup> Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup> They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but as they awoke they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup> Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah," not realizing what he was saying. <sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup> When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

<sup>37</sup> On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup> Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup> Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup> I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." <sup>41</sup> Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." <sup>42</sup> While he was being brought forward, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup> And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

## Discussion Questions

1. What stories in the Bible have a sort of 'transfiguration' where a person encounters God and there is divine, luminous grandeur? Can we tell those stories briefly?
2. Theophany is a word that is often used to describe these stories. What does theophany mean? What happens in a theophany?

3. Moments when God appears are not sweet and romantic. They are not pious or religious. Rather, they are moments when our world is shattered and everything is changed. How was Moses' life changed? How was Elijah's life changed? Or Paul's? How was Jesus' life changed?
4. Pastor Ron mentioned a podcast he loves, *No Small Endeavor*, that had a guest interview with Dacher Keltner who wrote a book called *Awe*. Keltner says there are 8 categories of things that cause awe:
  - Moral beauty
  - Collective effervescence
  - Nature
  - Music
  - Visual design
  - Spirituality/religion
  - Life and death
  - EpiphanyWhat kinds of experiences or moments might fit in each category? (*This helps us know what to look for as we look for awe in our lives.*)
5. How do we make space in our lives so that awe can happen?
6. What moments of theophany (or profound awe) have happened in our lives?
7. How does remembering God's holy appearances invoke our awe and prepare us for the season of Lent?

## Closing Prayer

Throughout the scriptures, you have come to your people in a cloud, with a voice, on mountains, and in the glory of shining light. In Jesus, you came to show us what it means to be your sons and daughters—to show us who you are. But like Peter, we are too often afraid or misguided about your sudden appearance.

Help us to realize that every day we stand on holy ground, called by the waters of baptism to walk the way of Jesus. Help us to stand in awe of your presence. Quiet our hearts and minds so that we can hear your voice. Give us courage to follow Jesus, even to Jerusalem. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.

*"Find the AWE around you."*