

**It's About Faith**  
**Luke 9:28-43a**  
**March 3, 2019 – Transfiguration Sunday**

This is the Sunday before Lent. Lent begins on Wednesday, and I begin by encouraging you to join in our Ash Wednesday services at 7:00 p.m. here in our sanctuary. The Sunday before Lent is traditionally Transfiguration Sunday; and the transfiguration is hugely important in the scheme of the Gospel literature.

First, the transfiguration truly cements Jesus' identity as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ. Here Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain with him. I frequently refer to Peter, James, and John as "the inner circle," those who are closest to Jesus. They were the first disciples called. You may remember a few weeks back, when we heard about the miraculous catch of fish and Jesus' call to become "fishers of people," it was Peter, James, and John whom he was addressing.

But there is someone else who is invited up that mountain; and that's you and me, the readers of the Gospel. Always remember that the Gospels were all written decades after Peter, James, and John died. The Gospels were not written for Peter, James, and John. The Gospels were written for the readers, the first century readers and every reader for the past two thousand years. The Gospels were written for you and for me. So, I invite you to travel up that mountain with Peter, James, and John, and, of course, Jesus.

When we arrive at the top, Jesus kneels to pray; and suddenly, he is transformed. His face begins to shine and his clothes seem white as snow. And then. . . Then there are these other mysterious presences. It seems that two other people, or should I say two other souls, are speaking with him – Moses and Elijah. We're not quite sure what's going on here or what they are saying. It seems to be really "heavy stuff." Moses is the central figure of the Jewish tradition. The entire Jewish Law is attributed to Moses. Indeed, Moses spoke face to face with God who instructed Moses in the way of truth and light and love. It was to Moses that God gave all the commandments.

Then there is Elijah, the principle prophet of the faith. You may remember it was Elijah who heard God in that "still small voice." It was Elijah who preserved the Jewish people in the midst of horrible persecution. And, it was Elijah who was carried to heaven on a golden chariot, not really suffering human death.

And so we witness this conversation of Jesus with the principles of Jewish law and prophecy. We witness it along with Peter, James, and John. Oh, by the way, did you hear that the disciples were almost overcome with sleep. You may remember the Maundy Thursday experience, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter could not keep his eyes open. Seems Peter really needs to get more sleep.

But then, Peter wants to build three dwellings, some translations say “tents,” some say “houses,” and some say “shrines.” It matters not. I have stated before, that Peter wants to put God in a box. Folks, Jesus is on the way to Calvary. Jesus is will soon be stripped naked and nailed to a cross. But Peter doesn’t get it. Peter wants to enshrine Jesus.

You know, some Christian traditions have a lot of statues in the sanctuary; and I need to say I don’t have a problem with that, as long as the statues are simply vehicles to understand and relate to the holy. I have no problem with the statuary, when the statues serve much the same purpose as our Bible, to help people better come closer to the holy. I do have a problem, when some people mistakenly begin to worship the statue. Now hear me, the worship of statues is not church doctrine, not in any tradition. Still, it can be easy to cross that line; and I tell you, in seeking to build dwellings there on the mountain top for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, Peter crossed that line. Peter wanted to enshrine his God, to physically put Jesus in a box. Peter simply does not understand the journey to the cross; and he will not understand it until the resurrection.

There are far too many people today that want to put God in a box, to draw a narrow view of the love of God, instead of drawing the circle wider. But that’s not the God that I worship; and I don’t think it’s the God that you worship.

So, what happened on that mountain? Peter and James and John are set straight. A thick cloud envelops them and us, and we hear a voice from heaven: “This is my Son, my chosen one, listen to him.” This is the second and the last time we will hear the holy voice. The first was at the baptism of Jesus: “You are my Son, my beloved. With you I am well pleased.”

But let us set Peter, James, and John aside. You and I have also heard the voice: “This is my Son. Listen to him.” And so you see, the first half of the transfiguration story is truly about the identity of Jesus. Having witnessed the events on the mountain top and having heard the very voice of God, we can have no doubt that Jesus is the Son of God, the chosen one, the Christ.

And this brings me to the second half of the lesson. We have the information. Jesus is the chosen one, the Christ, the Son of the living God. So what are we going to do with that?

Luke immediately follows the story of the transfiguration with an exorcism. But this really is not so much a story about Jesus casting out a demon or Jesus healing a little boy, as it is a story about faith. Jesus criticized the people, calling them a “faithless generation.” How often I have wondered what Jesus would say about our society today. Indeed, Jesus speaks harshly to the people; but let us never forget that despite his harsh words, Jesus does heal the child. And that is truly the great gift of grace.

How often have I said that God loves all people? God is the god of all people, saints and sinners. And yes, God heals all people, saints and sinners; and I

believe that part of the reason God heals sinners is to provide the opportunity to the sinners as well as the saints to come into a closer, fuller relationship with God, with the risen Christ.

God is speaking to us: “This is my Son, Listen to him. Listen to him. Listen to him.” And friends, listening involves more than just our ears. Listening means hearing the call on our lives. And listening also means responding to the call. You see, as Christians, identifying Jesus as the Son of the living God is the easy part. It’s the second part that’s difficult – having the faith to listen, having the faith to follow Jesus, wherever that path may lead.

May we as individuals, may we as a church, may we as a denomination, may we as a community, a nation, and yes may we even as a world have the faith to follow the call of Christ, a call of love, of inclusion, of acceptance, a call of peace. May we have the faith to follow that call wherever that call may lead.

Let us pray. . .

Holy Lord,  
We know that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,  
and so we ask your guidance.  
Give us the faith to hear your call,  
and give us the courage to follow that call  
wherever that call may lead.  
Amen.

Rev. Mark L. Steiger, Pastor  
North Olmsted United Methodist Church