

American Lutheran Church of Sun City
Transfiguration of Our Lord
February 10 - February 11, 2024
Pastor Karl Guhn

2Kings 2:1-12

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Mark 9:2-9

Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

I want to invite you to go on a journey with me this morning. This journey is a journey of your imagination and growth. You may find it an easy journey. It may be challenging. However, whatever it is for you I hope you will take it with me. I would like you to take a moment of reflection and remember back to when you first heard this wonderful story of Jesus' Transfiguration. Perhaps you remember it as a child. Perhaps you were older when you heard this story for the first time. Perhaps you are hearing it for the first time today. The story is so rich in imagery.

Can you recall, when you first heard this story what image stood out to you? For me the earliest image was the dazzling white clothes of Jesus. The language then spoke of those clothes as whiter than any "Fullers" soap

could bleach them. Now of course, we hear that they became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. I remember asking my mom what "Fullers" soap was. She told me it was a special soap that was used to whiten clothes. I said, "kind of like 20 mule team borax?" The TV show, Death Valley Days, was my point of reference. She just smiled and said yes. Now we have the common image of bleach, but the dazzling white of Jesus' clothes amazed me as a child. I could almost see in my mind's eye this white radiant being. What was your first image? If it is your first time hearing this story, what has jumped out for you?

Now, imagination is a wonderful thing. It helps us grow and develop our thought process and expand on the depth and breadth of life. Of course, it can be scary too. I remember a cartoon that read, "Most things I am afraid of are products of my imagination. Therefore, the thing I fear the most is my imagination." However, in this case, we will stay with the positive aspects of imagination. As we grow up life experiences cause us to begin to see things in different ways. I know as I grew older, I found myself wondering about the cloud and the voice of God, "This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him!" That image jumps at me quite often when I hear this story.

At different moments in our lives, different aspects of a story hold different meanings to us. This can be unsettling for us when applied to Bible stories. There is something in us that yearns for that voice of God that will clarify everything, all at once for us. If Bible stories can have different meanings at different times in our lives, then how will we know the truth? Now that is a big question, however, new images and new ways of seeing things are the story of our journey in faith. What you see as a child is not what you see as an adult. The God I knew as a child is not the God I know today. God is so much larger and broader and loving than the God I knew as a young teenager trying to make sense of complicated things.

What stands out to you now, today in your life? I can tell you, in Seminary, we heard a lot about Moses and Elijah standing there. They represent Israel's history, the law, and the prophets. When it is Jesus alone the early church is understanding Jesus as the fulfillment of all that God desires. The law and the prophets are fulfilled in Christ. Peter's babbling is another image. Though in truth, Peter is doing exactly what we do when confronted with things we do not understand. He is putting this moment in a context he can understand. Israel had a yearly festival called the Festival of the

Booths. People gathered together at Jerusalem and lived in tents outside of the city to remember the wilderness wanderings with Moses. The tents, or booths, would have been fitting given that Israel's history was standing right there.

My point here is to encourage you to simply reflect on the picture moments in this story, and to realize that what jumps out for you says a lot about where you are in your own faith journey. A story like Transfiguration can be a window to our souls. How do I see and understand God now? But like any signpost marking our journey, it is also a directional sign that points us forward into life.

Pastor Scott has been focused, this epiphany season, on God's declaration at Jesus' baptism "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" and how the suffering servant serves as a connection with God, Jesus, and us as part of the context of Beloved. The words declared today, serve as the other bookend in Epiphany, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." We might hear these words more directly. God says of Jesus - all that my son is and stands for is pleasing to me, you just might want to pay attention. Don't hear that as a warning, rather hear it as an invitation

into a life in Christ.

I want to read the Gospel story again. Listen once more to what stands out for you.

It strikes me that the most important thing for us as a community of faith in this moment of time, is threefold; God saying that we should listen to Jesus, that the disciples are left with Jesus alone, and they came back down from the mountaintop.

We are at a point in time where it feels like we are doing a lot of yelling at each other. Whether it is from bumper stickers on cars to flags flying, to political booths at farmer's markets, or to political commentators, we are yelling at each other. Civility almost feels like a thing of the past.

However, as a people of faith, our calling is not to be civil, it is to be loving. If we listen to Jesus, if we allow Jesus to be the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, then we know we are called to be like Jesus in the world. We are called to be faithful people active in love for the sake of both the neighbor

and enemy alike. I saw a meme on social media the other day that I liked. It said that when we read about Jesus, we discover that he saw two different types of people in the world. He saw a neighbor that was to be loved and he saw an enemy that is to be loved. Living life in love towards others is what God declares pleasing. It is Jesus to whom we should listen. By listening we might understand who we are to emulate and imitate wherever possible.

Seeing Jesus alone is to have no other authority in our lives. It means to look at the world as Jesus did and does. It means to respond to those around us as Jesus did and does. If what that means is confusing, the Gospel of Mark will make it clear as we work our way through the Gospel in this cycle of readings. Jesus is about healing the sick, he is about offering forgiveness, and he is about teaching what love looks like. Pay attention to the stories and you will see what our attitudes and lives are called to look like in a hurting world.

All of this happens when we come down from the mountaintop. In other words, this life of Jesus and our lives of faith happen in the real world. Jesus healed the sick. We know that this is not simply curing an illness. We

know that everyone Jesus healed or raised from the dead eventually died or died again. However, we can ask ourselves what is the most healing thing we can do right now? Being present to someone who is sick or in pain is healing. We might not know what to say or do, but visiting, holding a hand, and showing we care, are all healing actions. Listening to Jesus means to work at a faith that is lived in love in this very real world.

We are called, not to perfection, but to endeavor to both listen to Jesus and see only Jesus. Lord knows I have failed at this, more than I have succeeded. We stay alert though, watching for the need, hearing the call, and seeing Jesus before us. We listen to the stories we hear in worship. We listen to the stories we hear out there in the world realizing that a moment of clarity will come, the clouds will lift, and we will see only Jesus. It might be within us; it might be within the other who stands before us. God calls us to listen and pay attention. Jesus is everything we need to know about God and our life of faith. Amen