

Sermon: Transfiguration Sunday-Feb 23, 2020

Would you please pray with me, we have gathered here together today, O Lord, to offer you our worship. We offer you our thanks for this time and ask that all that we offer here and everyday, would be accepted in your grace and love. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

I have always appreciated the account of the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top. I have always appreciated so much the way that each Gospel writer describes what takes place, how as the author of Matthew tells us, "That Jesus face shone like the sun and that his clothes became dazzling white." I have always appreciated that this passage, this feast day comes just before we step into the Lenten wilderness, almost like it's a reminder for us all that in the reflective days of the Lenten season, that we can never ignore or forget the shining light of Christ, even when things seem bleak. I appreciate so much that the lead up this passage, if you are familiar with Matthew, the verses ahead of these deal specifically with Peter's unwillingness to accept that Jesus, as the messiah, would have to become the victim, would have to suffer, would have to be anything other than what he imagined him to be and right in the thick of Peter's unwillingness, Jesus is literally transformed before him; becomes dazzling white and Peter sees with his own eyes and hears with his own ears, who Jesus is; not who he wants him to be, not who he thinks he should be, but who he is.

Those are the things that make me appreciate this passage so much. But what I like most about it, is how all the Gospels authors describe, not so much what takes places, but the so very human response by those who witness it. Peter, James and John are witness to God's glory radiated before them, they are witness to an awe-inspiring moment, a moment that forever will change them, will forever guide them. They are literally overcome with the truth before them Why they ask, if we have been to the top of the mountain, would we ever go down? Why would we go back to all that conflict and nonsense below the cloud line, when we could stay here and bask in the glory of God? Effectively they are experiencing a good thing, maybe the best thing they have ever experienced, and they don't want to let go of it, they don't want to give it up. That's what I like best about this passage, it's the overt human reaction, to not want to let go of a good thing.

When my wife was pregnant with our first child, her due date came and went. For close to two weeks, nothing about her pregnancy change, except her comfort level; each day became more unbearable then the last, but the baby refused to be born, refused to shift, refused to do anything other then seemingly hang on for dear life. I use to tell people that that is when I knew we were having a boy, because boys and men tend to never want to let go a good thing, but what life has shown me over the years, is that is not just a characteristic of a gender, but all humankind. It is the reason why people post pictures of their hot holiday on social media as

they are waiting for the plane to fly them home; they don't want to let go of the wonderful things they had for the last few days.

It's the reason why after every major holidays in our lives, is the huge let down of the next day; we loved being in that moment, being in the wonder and joy of whatever it was we were experiencing, we don't want to let that go. I can recall sitting at a anniversary lunch years ago for my grandparents and one of their nieces asked them, if they ever thought about what life would have been like had they not been together; my grandmother, without missing a beat said, "Never once, I have such a good thing with Bob, why would I want anything different?"

We as humans are as such, that when we have good thing, whatever that thing may be, we don't want to let it go. When we have that amazing meal, we want to keep eating it. When we have the night out with friends that was really what we needed, we don't want to have to go to bed. We don't want to let it go, maybe out of the fear that we will not ever get the chance to hold it again., to taste it again, to experience it again.

That's what I believe the disciples were thinking when they said to Jesus lets stay here, lets building dwelling places; let's let you be this, this radiating and beloved Son of God, lets not go back down the mountain where everyone else thinks that you're a sham. Let not let go of this good thing. Added to this are the final words that Jesus speaks to them about this experience as they finally do come down the mountain, which are, "Don't tell anyone until after the son of humankind has been raised from the dead." It feels like those words are speaking into the reality that the disciples were experiencing.

They didn't want to come down, they didn't want to leave, they had this good thing going at the top of the mountain, fully understanding who Jesus was, hearing the voice of God saying this is my beloved, seeing the prophets of old, feeling in every way possible the absolute awe of that moment, they wanted to remain, but Jesus convinces them to come down and then as they do we says, "oh, but don't tell anyone." You can almost hear them say, "For crying out loud that's why we wanted to stay up there. We had a good thing going, we could have made dwellings, could have been happy and you told us to come down the mountain, and so we did, but now we can't talk about it." It must have felt like living in an episode of the twilight zone. Up was down, down was up; it must have felt out of control.

Which I believe might have been the point. You see reading this passage over and over this week, it occurred to me that Jesus in this moment, and maybe elsewhere in the Gospels, but for sure in this moment is saying to these disciples, live this good thing you have experienced. Don't just talk about it , don't just dream about hiding it away, live it. He tells them you can't stay on the mountain you have to go back into the valleys of life; life isn't just mountain tops, its also filled with valleys, but the choice you can make is to live this good thing. Let this good thing, guide you in the everyday of life.

I believe we have allowed this misguided understanding of hanging on to a good thing guide us, and maybe its fear that does it, but regardless we have this idea that when something good happens, we have to grab hold of it tightly because it might not happen again, or may not experience it fully like we did the first time. But what I see Jesus asking us to do is to let that good thing whatever it was, guide us into the next moment of life.

Think about this context here in Matthew. Jesus has just been revealed to be the son of God, to be the Christ. Peter, James and John now know without a shadow of doubt that Jesus is the messiah, that God is doing a new thing in the world, that the love Jesus have spoken of and talked about is a love that always wins; the kingdom of God was a real experience, a way of life that can and will make a difference for them and others. Imagine what that knowledge could have been for them; no doubts about God, about Jesus only full on truth. But they are afraid that the moment they step off the mountain that truth will no longer be real, or they will not be able to experience the goodness of God fully as they just did. They are afraid that when all the horrible stuff that Jesus talks about will happen happens, that maybe just maybe it will go bad; maybe just maybe the good thing they had would go away.

But Jesus wants them to step off the mountain changed. He wants them to step down into the valley of life, the valleys filled with the sorrows and the joys and the good times and the hard times changed by the fact, the fact not the belief, but the fact that God's grace is always present and even when it doesn't look like its around, God is in fact always doing something new. He wants them to live the goodness that they witnessed, he wants them to be guided by it in everyway and he doesn't want to hear them talk about, he wants to see it in their actions, in how they respond to him and the world around them; he wants them to be so full of that goodness that when the cross happens that those around them that didn't experience the mountaintop first hand, will still believe that the impossible is possible through the goodness and grace they offer; the way handle the situation. That's what he wants, Jesus wants them to let the good times not hold them back but spur them forward.

So what about us? Well I cannot present to you today a radiating Jesus, full of light and love so that every doubt you have will be quenched. I cannot offer you proof beyond a shadow of doubt, that will cause you to step down from the mountain top and proclaim to the depths of your souls that Christ is present in the valley. But what I can offer you is human nature; because I think Jesus wanted us to use our human nature. Think about any of the good things you have or have experienced in your life. Maybe it was the love of someone who walks with you in life, maybe it was the food that you had at the restaurant that was just so amazing that you ate more then you should have. Maybe it was the night out with your friends that you really needed. Maybe it was all of this and more. Absolutely we don't want those good things to end, but in reality, they don't end, we have just convinced ourselves that they do; that goodness whatever it is lives on fully within us always. Whatever that good thing is, the reality

is once we have experienced that good things we want more and we actively start to work to make it happen again and again.

We tell people about the restaurant and go back and order the same thing over and over. We plan more regular nights out with friends because it was good to get some time away. We start to save to take the next vacation to get back into the good feeling. We build up that love filled relationship, so that it keeps us fulfilled. We actively work to make those good things happen again and again and again. That our nature, but our minds tell us those moment are fleeting and that we must protect them and never let them go. Jesus, I believe, ask us to feel our faith, to feel the presence of God in the same ways as we would a vacation, or great meal or the love of our lives. That we would be so moved by God's grace and goodness, by God's radiating light of love, that we would live it out always; always seeking it, always trying to recreate that mountain top moment in the valleys of everyday life. What he asked of his disciples then and now is to live in hope.

When the hardships, and pains and grief of life come, and they do come and often they will bring us to the lowest of lows, but to live out the good that we have experienced on the mountain tops of our lives, is to always live in hope; and I don't just mean hoping that things will get better, but actually living out the hope, actively working to make things better. That I believe is what we need to hear as we enter into the wilderness of Lent, that life is indeed full of valley moments, but at the end of the day we must live into the hope of love, live into the goodness of God presence, the light of Christs grace and make it as real as real can be each and everyday. It won't always be perfect, but we are not called to perfection, we are called to simply walk off the mountain and try. May it be so with us today and always. Amen.