

February 26, 2017 Transfiguration
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Exodus 24:12-18, Psalm 2
2 Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9

David Lose.net posted 2/22/17; Che Thunder Canyon Jim, live on Facebook 2/23/17;
Julian Brave NoiseCat, Standing Rock Is Burning But our Resistance Isn't Over, The Guardian.com on 2/23/17;
The Intercept.com 2/25/17, Video a Closing Prayer for Standing Rocks Oceti Sakowin.

Grace and peace, beloved of Christ. Amen

Years ago at the impassioned request of a certain then-3 year old, in a moment of softness,
we invested in a pair of “sparkle shoes”.

Seriously, basic, slip on, go to church, kid shoes encased in pink and gold and silver and red glitter.

I mean, honestly, marketers are smart, very smart, and who could resist the sparkle, the glow, the radiance,
the opportunity to dance and twirl planted in shoes...that sparkle?!

That's how our current three year old acquired this much beloved hand-me-down.

And that's how I've come to think anew about the glow, the radiance of the Transfiguration.

In Matthew's telling of this pivotal, powerful story, Jesus has just made his first of four passion predictions.
How did it go? I suppose that depends on who you ask.

It appears that Jesus laid it out clearly with a mix of the religious politics of his time (and, of course,
Matthew's time) and some basics like suffering, death, resurrection.

Peter isn't convinced, though, and he pushes back, “God, forbid Jesus, This must never happen to you.”

But Jesus can see the fuller picture, the weight of the cross, the complicated role of these trusted disciples.

It's six days after this prediction when Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain.

It's six days after when the ancestors in the tradition, Moses and Elijah, are talking with Jesus.

It's six days after when, similar to his baptism not-so-many years before, a cloud overshadows and in the
fuzzy thin air the voice of God rings out again: *This is my child, my beloved, with him I am well pleased.*

It's six days after that unfathomable prediction when Jesus' face shines like the sun, and, well, he sparkles.

I don't know who needs this moment more—Jesus as his identity is becoming more and more clear.

Or Peter and the others, the eyewitnesses to the glory, they'd later claim.

In the moment, I imagine, it was an awesome, terrifying place for Peter: What do you do? How do you act?

On that windy mountain, Peter, antsy to do something, anything, wondered aloud to Jesus, “Should we
make three dwellings? Should we stay here? Could we stay here?”

Might we find a way, Jesus, to capture this holy, sacred time, for your face is glowing, sparkling?

But much as we'd be tempted to stay, like Peter, or to do something, anything, Jesus offers a few words and then they are off, trudging back down the mountain, never, ever really the same.

And that's the point. **That is the very point, something happened in that time...**

In that time between the passion predictions.... and the passion of cross.

In that time when Jesus' face glowed, it sparkled, and they were surely on holy ground.

Something happened and they are left never quite the same.

We call them mountain top experiences.

I have a vivid memory of my first college spring break trip to build houses with Habitat for Humanity in Coahoma, Mississippi.

Mountain top experiences: that particular retreat when God seemed close, or summer camp as a teenager.

A piece of music that swelled like never before. A big concept finally mastered.

Holy moments, too, in birth and death, in beginnings and endings: the conception of an idea or a hope, the child finally in your arms, the loss of a loved one, the letting go and accepting, the clarity of a relationship coming together—or coming a part, the affirmation of a community, a moment of a-ha or new energy, the teary sparkle in someone's eye—or maybe that was your eye, that feeling after communion, that sense of mission—doing something hard together.

The image from this week that has seared into my mind's eye comes from the news, from the Osceti Sakowin camp in Cannon Ball, North Dakota, on the Standing Rock Reservation. where water protectors had a Wednesday eviction deadline.

In the footage I viewed, as snow silently fell, flames engulfed a couple of the make-shift buildings and traditional structures, and black smoke rose skyward.

More reverent to burn them, some explained, than to let the bull-dozers have their way.

"A final act of prayer and defiance" one article called it.

This week the pictures and stories said so much:

the red and orange flames bursting from a gray and snowy February landscape, a community praying and packing as they tried to come to terms with the days, the months gone by, how they had captured the hearts, but really the tensions, of our nation, and what this moment means, what we value, who we value, how we embody this value, and really, what we hold as sacred.

Something happened in that time, and it can't be untangled from the elections or their aftermath, really, it can't be untangled from the tension in our land right now, nor should it, be,

for in that prayer, in that resistance, I saw sparkle, radiance, a glow, flames against a gray winter sky. And that is holy, that is sacred, that is the glow that carries us another leg of the journey...and it takes us down the mountain to the fertile (and sometimes melancholy) valleys where we actually live.

We enter Lent this week. On Wednesday many will gather again as we mark one another with ashes,
From dust you came, to dust you shall return.

It is a dry and dusty time, there is no doubt.

These moments of elevation, of sparkle, are our time of transfiguration for the journey that is to come.

Three words, really phrases from today's reading, and I borrow these from David Lose:

The first is instruction: This is my son, the beloved: Listen to him.

How obvious, and how easily we forget. Listen to him.

In these troubled days...We'd do well to listen to Jesus. Listen to his words, and listen to his actions.

Who does he touch? How does he love? When does he push back? Where does he draw comfort?

The truth is that we each will "hear" him a little differently, and yet there is something important and powerful in trying to listen together, and then follow together.

The second is a command: Get up, Jesus touches Peter, James and John, and says, Get up.

This isn't "Get up" like you'd better do it, but rather the Greek verb is the same as the angel uses at the tomb when talking with the women about how Jesus has been raised.

So it's probably more accurately: "be raised up" or even "be resurrected." Get up.

When despair or that sense of being overwhelmed at so much unknown has a grip,

Jesus says again to them, to us: Get up, or, really, to let yourselves be raised.

For such a time as this, we are called: to act out mercy, to speak clearly, to live with a decisiveness.

We've got things to do—Get up.

Finally a promise: Jesus says to them, like he says so many other times: Do not be afraid.

Of course he knows that they are, that we are, but he's got us and we don't need to be afraid.

Jesus holds us

David Lose writes, "Because God is God of the past, present, and future, we need not fear."

Describing the last day at the camp at Standing Rock, Che (CHAY) Jim, Thunder Canyon told of the prayer walk they organized to lead them out of the camp that final time.

He said that as they walked the women carried the sacred water, and the men carried the sacred flame. And in those experiences...the months of encampment and prayer, the strong, empowered voices of the indigenous community, the prayer walk even on that last day, Thunder Canyon said: **we are the beginning of a new generation of carriers**, people who **carry** on the tradition, the values, beliefs.

I believe that's what happened on the mountain that day when Jesus sparkled and then when they trekked down again to the valley, never quite the same.

In a powerful way, Peter and James and John became part of a new generation of those who carry the holy. Eyewitnesses, so that we may be eyewitnesses today of our own sort.

Beloved in Christ, that's our calling, too...

To witness the sparkle, for something holy is happening,

and, indeed, when the time is right, to let God's light, Jesus' love sparkle through us.

Amen.