

February 27, 2022 Transfiguration of Jesus
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Corinthians 3:12—4:2
Luke 9:28-43

[<https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/glimpse-of-glory>, Debie Thomas for this date, Down From the Mountain, includes the quote and citation from Richard Rohr: <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/3332-down-from-the-mountain>. Verity Jones in the Christian Century on January 19, 2016, includes the MLK quote: https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2015-12/february-7-transfiguration-sunday?code=cesPCBhNzFUat6u6IIISy&utm_source=Christian+Century+Newsletter&utm_campaign=ec42ce02d0-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_SCP_2022-02-21&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b00cd618da-ec42ce02d0-86340259.
Final prayer is from ELW #637, v 5, Holy God, Holy and Glorious, by Susan Briehl and Robert Buckley Farlee.]

Grace and peace, through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, first of all, it's good to be with you today.

One thing I miss when we are worshipping online-only

is the back and forth dialogue that can happen in the sanctuary.

I know it can feel strange for some, but it helps me to know if we're connecting, if the Spirit is speaking.

Today it is more than appropriate to add an Amen or an Hallelujah as we go.

As you heard in the children's message:

at the end of today's service, we'll "hide the hallelujahs."

Our kids will help the community tuck away these exclamations of praise

while we move into this quieter season of Lent, that's coming quickly.

For today, can I get an Hallelujah?

We call this Sunday Transfiguration Sunday or Transfiguration of Our Lord.

It always falls on the last Sunday of Epiphany, just before Ash Wednesday.

This season of Epiphany is all about revelation,

Jesus, being revealed, seen, made manifest, known.

We hear stories like Jesus' baptism—the heavens parting, the voice of God that declares Jesus beloved.

Stories like the miracle at the wedding in Cana, with its bounty.

And stories like the Sermon on the Plain with its radical leveling, and love your *enemies*.

This Sunday's mountain top story is an epiphany at its best:

In Luke's telling of this pivotal story, one we hear also in both Matthew's gospel and Mark's,

Jesus has just made the first prediction of his death, of what is to come in Jerusalem.

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 some basics like suffering, death, resurrection.

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

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

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

It's eight days after, when, similar to at his baptism, a cloud overshadows.

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 eight days after that unfathomable prediction when Jesus' face shines like the sun.

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.

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?"

Might we find a way, Jesus, to capture, to honor, this holy, sacred time, for your face is glowing?
But much as we'd be tempted to stay like Peter, or to do something, anything,
Jesus offers only 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 prediction, and the passion of the cross.
In that time when Jesus' face glowed, and they were surely on holy ground.
Something happened, and they are left never quite the same. (Pause)

Can you say Mountain Top Experience?

This is it. This is what we mean. Hallelujah.
Something happens in that moment and we're left never quite the same.
I love to hear your mountain top experiences, when you glimpsed God, when Jesus felt close.
Think for a moment of your experiences.
A retreat when things clicked and conversations went deep and you felt connected?
A youth trip or campus ministry experience, or summer camp?
The birth of a child or the bedside of a loved one or a certain hymn or the sun through the stain glass?
A literal mountain top, or lake side, or finish line, or word from the doctor that the cancer is gone?
I asked my spouse Jane about her mountain tops and she commented that her mountain tops aren't very
high right now, the small things, like after a half dozen attempts, finally getting our youngest child
vaccinated—a huge triumphant that took more prayer and trust than most can imagine. Hallelujah!

Franciscan priest and mystic Richard Rohr pushes back against mountain top experiences,
for he sees how they can make an artificial divide ...
between the spiritual and the so-called non-spiritual."

Perhaps Jane is edging toward Richard Rohr's ways of thinking
"This dualism," Rohr continues, "is precisely what Jesus came to reveal as a lie.
The Incarnation proclaims that matter and spirit have never been separate.
Jesus came to tell us that these two seemingly different worlds are —
and always have been — one."

Rohr has a point,
AND those mountain top experiences,
or let's just say, those moments of feeling particularly close to God,
have carried me (and likely most of us)
through valleys and level places when I truly needed them.

As I was studying this passage this week and doing some reading,

I noticed something that I'd never seen before.
Remember how I said that Matthew, Mark and Luke ALL include this transfiguration, mountain top, story?
In all three gospels the transfiguration story **also concludes** with the healing of a boy who they say has an
"unclean spirit".
You heard it: this father has come to Jesus desperately seeking healing for his child.
Now, most years, I opt for the shorter, quicker reading of the gospel (Amen) just the mountain top,
but this year it seemed helpful to notice what happens when
Jesus and Peter and James and John come down the mountain.

"On the next day," it says.

On the next day, the mystery and glow still fresh on their hearts, lodged forever in their mind's eye...
On the next day, it's pretty mundane, beloveds: crowds, desperate parents, struggling kids, healing.

Debie Thomas writes, "What happens in the ordinary trials and tribulations of human life is just as God-infused as the experiences that occur on faith's mountaintops."

We need that this week, don't we?

I was thinking of that desperate father in the story
as I watched tweets and articles and reports pile in these last days from Ukraine.
I know many of you have seen the images too, glued to the news,
concerned as we should be at what is transpiring and what it means.
The heartbreaking image that caught me is one that has been shared widely:
a father with a blue stripped scarf, weeping,
bundling up his daughter against the cold
as he says good-bye and sends off to a safe zone
while he goes to join the fight.

We can get caught up on the mountain tops.

We can assume our spirituality is at its best when we "feel it",
but our incarnate savior has more to do, more to say, more to heal.
Jesus came down from the mountain top and "on the next day" he met the need with healing. Hallelujah
"On the next day."
"On the next day"... Jesus' epiphany continues,
healing and holding, speaking power to even the unclean spirit.
These two stories are intricately woven and more essential to one another than I have ever realized.
The glory of the mountain top finds it's real power... on the next day, in the valley.

The night before he was assassinated, Dr. King was preaching at the Mason Temple in Memphis.

He said, "We've got some difficult days ahead.
But it doesn't matter with me now.
Because I've been to the mountaintop. . . .
And I've seen the Promised Land.
I may not get there with you.
But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land."

Friends, we get to the promised land in fits and starts, don't we?

Yes, we may yearn for the mountain tops, and truth is,
they'll come when they do, and they aren't typically ours to determine.
Those glimpses of glory, our glimpses of glory, shape what happens "on the next day,"
And that's where our attention is best placed.
Jesus is there, sitting quietly by yet another child ravaged by trauma,
by a country steeped in painful history and tremendous resilience,
Jesus is there, in the chaos and the unknowns,
the families separated,
the always vulnerable ever more vulnerable.
Jesus is there, in the makeshift basement bomb shelters, fingers silently shuttling over prayer beads.
Jesus is there, in the stream of refugees, hundreds of thousands of refugees,
making seemingly impossible choices, because they must.

On the next day.

Dear ones, followers of the Savior of peace, let us pray for peace.
The prayer candles are out today,
take time throughout the service to come and light one.
There is also a card available that we'll send to the congregation of

St. Michael's and St. George's Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in northeast Minneapolis
You are welcome to add your name, and a note if you'd like.

On the next day: Let us pray for peace,

And let us practice that very peace in our lives:
paying attention to the needs,
listening and speaking,
giving and protesting,
resting and weeping,
praying with all the beloveds for this worlds pain.

In a moment we'll sing, for now we pray:

"Holy God, holy and living one,
life that never ends,
you show your love by dying,
dying for your friends,
and we behold you living."

Amen. Hallelujah.