

**February 11, 2024 Transfiguration of Jesus**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**2 Kings 2:1-12, 2 Corinthians 4:3-6**  
**Mark 9:2-9**

Working Preacher for this date, by David Schnasa Jacobsen, with ideas from Ched Myers Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/transfiguration-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-mark-92-9-6>; Ideas from Debbie Thomas in the Cristian Century, April 11, 2018, Learning to Embrace the In-between time [https://www.christiancentury.org/article/faith-matters/learning-embrace-between-time?code=cDlu9NBdn1hu7C9xBgEW&utm\\_source=Christian+Century+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=c4d08b43ee-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_SCP\\_2024-02-05&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-31c915c0b7-%5BLIST\\_EMAIL\\_ID%5D](https://www.christiancentury.org/article/faith-matters/learning-embrace-between-time?code=cDlu9NBdn1hu7C9xBgEW&utm_source=Christian+Century+Newsletter&utm_campaign=c4d08b43ee-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_SCP_2024-02-05&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-31c915c0b7-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D)

**Grace and peace, to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen**

**Dear ones, these are some in-between times in which we live, aren't they?**

Tornados churned through south central Wisconsin this week—never before recorded in February,  
kids here at home asked if maybe, just maybe, they could wear shorts to school ...  
...and the conviction to slow this warming pattern hasn't yet penetrated our capitalism.

The messy presidential election cycle makes daily headlines,  
the divisions and threats of division, are daunting...  
...and we don't know how it will end.

In between times.

The wars continue, a humanitarian crisis is at hand... and the cries for ceasefire seem to go unheard.  
Health can be precarious, we wait to learn more,  
uncertain what to say or how to say it...  
and it all can be so overwhelming.

These are in-between times, my friends, in-between times.

**Our gospel begins: "Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John,**  
and led them up a high mountain, apart, by themselves.  
And he was transfigured, before them."

Do you wonder happened six days before this mountain top? !

Six days earlier, Jesus was calling them together and telling them about discipleship.

He used words like following, denying oneself, taking up the cross, losing one's life.

That was six days ago... the cross is still some weeks ahead.

Today's mountain top experience can seem like an end in itself, but I don't think that's the point.

We're not at the end of the arc, but rather smack in the middle.

**Our readings this morning all have an air of in-between.**

The prophet Elijah is handing on power to the prophet Elisha—what a scene!

In Corinthians, God's mercy is real, even when we may be flagging, even when we may be losing heart, or the message seems veiled, God's light is shining.

**In this in-between time, Jesus takes** his trusted disciples up the mountain.

It's in this **in-between** time when the ancestors in the tradition, Moses and Elijah, talk with Jesus.

It's in **this time** when the cloud overshadows and in the fuzzy, thin air the voice of God rings.

Now if this is sounding familiar, it is: All along this arc, God's voice speaks.

Nine chapters earlier, at the beginning of Mark,

when Jesus dipped into the Jordan, and the heavens were torn apart,

God blessed Jesus, reminded him: **"You are my beloved," you can do this hard thing.**

Today, on this transfiguration mountain, in case Peter and James and John wondered,

in case they were tempted to shrug off the glory,

in case the talk of following gave them pause,

God says it plainly: **"This is my Son, my child, my beloved - Listen to him."**

Nearer to the end of the gospel, at the foot of the cross, the centurion's words will echo still,

a similar pattern: **Truly this one is the son of God.** (Mk 15:39)

On that mountain, in this **in-between time**, between his baptism and his death, Jesus is transfigured.

**I've been thinking this week about Transfiguration. Why? Why here? Why now?**

There's something powerful about glory, especially glory that lands in the middle of everything else.

Glory, mystery, in the in-between times, unexpected.

Glory that doesn't have to be contained,

but in itself has space for the messy, the broken, the unfinished,

the jaw hanging open, tears in our eyes,

the linking of past and present and future in a way that no one could contrive,

the labor and birth that comes with death and new life.

**Oh, those disciples scramble, don't they?**

What should we do? How should we act?

Let's build a shelter?      God bless them! I get it!

But Jesus knows they just need to be there,

vulnerable, raw to the glory, open to the mystery,

soaking in this moment when what has been, and what will be, is linked, is clarified.

And after a time, they'll troop down the mountain again,

rubbing their eyes, probably full of even more questions,  
and yet never quite the same for what they witnessed.

**Their in-between times will be richer for this moment.** I trust that.

**Preacher Karoline Lewis says, a Transfigured God means we must be Transfigured Believers.**

That's our call, my friends, transfigured believers.

Changed, never quite the same for the moment we glimpsed glory.

Debie Thomas writes, "I hope that in-betweenness loosens us, frees us, transfigures us, and refines us."

She continues, "I hope it prepares us slowly and surely for the dawn that awaits."

A transfigured God means we can be transfigured believers.

The God who takes us to the mountain top,

will lead us in the valley,

will sit with us at the bedside,

will carry us in the desert.

God will inspire our community to love mercy, to act with justice,

By grace God will open us to the learning that await us, to the gentle grace, that is before us. I trust that.

A transfigured God means we can be transfigured believers. Can I get an Amen?

**Before I close, I want to share one more thing this morning.**

I share this in a spirit of transparency.

Some of you have heard that there is a bishop's election coming in early May here in our synod,  
the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA.

Our current Bishop, Bp. Ann Svennungsen, is completing 12 years in this office and is retiring.

As the synod prepares for the synod assembly in May,

yesterday we had the first big step in the election process,

nominating people for this role and narrowing the list of nominees.

**For awhile, people have pulled me aside and**

wondered if I'd be willing to have my name go forward for this role of Bishop of our synod.

I committed to let my name go forward in the process, and that's what happened yesterday.

I say it this way: "I'm open to this nomination, because I trust the Holy Spirit's working,

and I have a lot of mixed up feelings."

**My feelings are mixed because I love you all, and where the Spirit is leading us.**

I thoroughly enjoy being one of your pastors.

Letting my name go forward does NOT mean that I will be elected, but it means I could be elected.

And it means that we all—our congregation, me, my family—will have to live in these in-between times,  
trusting God's care for each of us and our congregation,  
seeking to follow Jesus' call,  
staying grounded right where we are, right here, when all sorts of anxiety could pull us apart.

**Our congregation has some history with these elections,**

you as a community of faith have been through this before  
and I'm suspecting there's some muscle memory that will help us.

I share this nomination so you are in the same "know" that the rest of the synod is.

If you've got concerns or questions,  
you can talk with me, with Pastor Maria, with our leaders.

**So here's my prayer for us today, for always.**

A familiar prayer for all the in-between times, the mountain tops, and the flat lands alike. Let us prayer:

Gracious God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,  
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.  
Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,  
but only that your hand is leading us,  
and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ. Amen.