

**Sermon: Transfiguration Sunday (A) 2/15/26****Peace, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher****Texts: Exodus 24:12-18, Matthew 17:1-9**

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday in Epiphany, the pivot point for entering Lent this Wednesday. The gospel story is familiar to many of us, but familiarity can mean we lose the sense of wonder captured there...and also means we may bring to the story some assumptions that don't actually fit. So maybe we need to approach it with what the children and I just talked about...with wonder and holy imagination...and with hope that we will find in it something that can encourage us in our own journey as disciples...the lifelong journey of figuring out who each of us is being called to be and do personally, the journey we are making as Peace Lutheran Church before we call a new settled pastor, and the journey of how, in these dangerous and troubled times, we can live and act faithfully with confidence and hope. Let's give it a try.

The story begins with Jesus inviting Peter, James, and John to climb a mountain, a **high** mountain, in the fading light of day, hunting for a strong place to pray. And in case you don't remember, Matthew likes to use mountaintops as places of revelation and reorientation, as when he tells of Jesus proclaiming the Beatitudes. Hold that thought.

The disciples and Jesus probably weren't talking, just breathing, maybe even panting at times as they climbed higher and higher. Finally they arrived, sat down, and closed their eyes. But suddenly, even with their eyes **closed**, the disciples "saw" or felt light. They weren't sure whether to open their eyes to see where the light was coming from...but then they did.

And there, right in front of them, was Jesus, but Jesus looking not at all like the one who'd called them as disciples and had called them to come and pray. The Jesus they saw in front of them was pulsing with

light and his clothes were dazzling white. **And** there were two **other** people with him...Moses and Elijah, and they were talking with Jesus. That's when Peter remembered the story of the tent of meeting in the wilderness when Moses met God and the story of Moses meeting with God on Mt. Sinai, so he offers to set up tents...one for each of them. Peter's instincts were good...he knew he was in the presence of The Presence, of God, but as often happened with Peter, he missed the point. Peter wanted to honor and **preserve** this amazing moment in some way. But God interrupted Peter, saying the words only Jesus had heard at his baptism, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased," and adding now, "Listen to him!" Those words, now spoken in the disciples' hearing, signaled not just the importance and authority of Jesus, but also the revelation that in the **new** community, **listening** is the primary posture of discipleship. In the future, as the three disciples would learn, Jesus wouldn't remain with them after the resurrection. So his disciples, including Peter, James, and John, would use what they had learned by listening to Jesus to teach, encourage, and guide the emerging Christian community.

Of course, the three disciples didn't "get" all this in the moment. Indeed, when the voices from heaven uttered these words, they fell over, maybe even fainted, overwhelmed by fear. Yet this wasn't simple awe or terror. It was fear of the Lord, a reverent, embodied response to the presence of God that runs deep in the Hebrew scriptures. This kind of fear isn't irrational or shameful; rather it is the appropriate recognition that one is standing on holy ground.

And then Jesus touches the three disciples and says, "Get up and do not be afraid." Jesus' authority in Matthew isn't distant or crushing; it doesn't **overwhelm** human fear; rather it meets it **with presence**. So the authority the disciples inherit and will exercise in the future isn't the radiance of the mountaintop, but rather the nearness of Christ in moments of fear...and the community of Christians **will** be afraid...of Rome, of those among the Jews who thought they were heretics, or of

their neighbors who simply found them too strange or too darn loving to be trusted.

There, on the mountain, experiencing the touch of Jesus, the three disciples dare to look up. When they do, they see that Moses and Elijah are gone. Only Jesus remains. And so it becomes clear that from now on, listening to Jesus has become the way the law and the prophets are **lived** rather than preserved.

Then, finally, the disciples and Jesus come down the mountain. As they go, Jesus orders them to say nothing about what they had seen and heard until after the resurrection. And so they go, now with **some** understanding of what God's authority **sounds** like...a voice that calls for listening, and with **some** understanding of what God's authority **looks** like, a hand that touches and calms fear. So, even though the three will **themselves** often forget and have to be reminded, they move downward with Jesus...into silence, suffering, and trust, continuing to watch, listen to, and learn from the One God had signaled would show them how.

Well, friends, you and I weren't on the mountaintop that day. But we too know something about fear, uncertainty, and transitions...we're living **through** one, with Pr. Diane guiding us and God guiding us **all**. So, how wonderful that today we hear **this** story, so helpful and reassuring. It doesn't offer false comfort or ask us to forget our fears. Instead, it reassures us that God doesn't abandon us when we lose clarity; that Christ remains present (sometimes radiant, sometimes quiet) calling the Church to listen, rise, and follow, even when the path ahead isn't clear. **And** it assures us that, in the midst of transition, when we find ourselves living between the questions and the answers, between promise and fulfillment, faithfulness isn't measured by completion or control, but by trust. God's promises are not nullified by uncertainty; they are carried forward **through** it.

Someone has said that today's gospel story names the reality of **unfinished hope**: the call to live faithfully when prayers are still unanswered, when the future of our congregation feels unclear, and when God's work seems only **partially** visible. The Transfiguration doesn't **resolve** that tension. Instead, it **blesses** it. The disciples descend the mountain not with answers, but with Jesus, and that is enough to keep on walking...until what God has prepared for us – because God **loves** us – is revealed.

Today you've heard a story you can carry with you as you go. It tells you nobody has to go up the mountain alone...that sometimes things get really scary before they get holy...but above all, that there's someone standing at the center of the cloud **with** you, shining so brightly you may **never** be able to wrap your mind around him, but who is worth listening to all the same because he, Jesus, is God's Beloved, and whatever comes next, you – and Jesus – are up for it. Amen.