

Lectionary C Transfiguration Sunday February 7, 2016
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-36, (37-43)

After the Mountain Top

Can you t imagine? Being on that mountain top seeing Jesus changed or transfigured, his clothing shining so bright it blinds you? And all of a sudden Jesus is talking to Moses and Elijah. Then you hear the very voice of God!

No wonder Peter stuttered around, “Uh, I’ll build you guys tents.” What a guy. Peter. I guess he thought he had to do something. Think of the impact this experience had on Peter, James, and John. The Message Bible says, *“They were speechless. And they continued speechless, said not one thing to anyone during those days of what they had seen.”*

Then—they came down the mountain with Jesus. Now earlier this week when Pastor Grate and I were going over these lessons. This last part just didn’t seem like it belonged. After all, it is Transfiguration Sunday. It’s all about Jesus all glowing on the mountain top isn’t it?

Well, yes, and after holding these verses in my prayers all week, I am beginning to see that Transfiguration Sunday is really all about what happens next. I mean after the mountain top.

When they walked down from the mountain, life pretty much smacked Jesus and Peter, James and John in the face. Before he even got all the way down the side of the mountain the crowds bombarded Jesus. Things got messy. Here’s the scene described by the Message Bible. *“When they came down off the mountain the next day, a big crowd was there to meet them. A man called from out of the crowd, “Please, please, Teacher, take a look at my son. He’s my only child. Often a spirit seizes him. Suddenly he’s screaming, thrown into convulsions, his mouth foaming. And then it beats him black-and-blue before it leaves. I asked your disciples to deliver him but they couldn’t.”*

Jesus answers this desperate father in a frustrated way. *“What a generation! No sense of God! No focus to your lives! How many times do I have to go over these things? How much longer do I have to put up with this? Bring your son here.”* Life gets chaotic and confusing.

And the point of this whole story, I think, is to look at how Jesus handled this messy life situation. Jesus is ticked off. But then he listens. As the boy comes toward Jesus it goes on to say, *“the demon slammed him to the ground and threw him into convulsions. Jesus stepped in, ordered the vile spirit gone, healed the boy, and handed him back to his father.* Jesus stepped in and took action.

Mountain tops change us. Take Peter, James and John. We already know they were left speechless from what they experienced on top of the mountain. But I don’t think that experience

would not have made a lasting impression if they had not witnessed its aftermath; if they had not witnessed Jesus facing real life after the mountain top.

We have all had times that could be described as “mountain top” experiences. They could be on a special retreat, like Tres Dias, or Walk to Emmaus, or a private time of prayer, or a walk in nature, or like I recently experienced, the birth of a baby. During these mountain top times, we feel God close to us and a glimpse of God’s tremendous love shines so bright it leaves us shaky, speechless, amazed. And we hear God’s love so plainly, as if the very voice of God is speaking. But mountain top experiences don’t last long. As much as we want to build a tent and stay on the mountain, these glimpses of God aren’t meant to last forever.

However, when they do happen, they do something to us. They strengthen us, and prepare us to face the messiness of life after the mountain top. That is what our 2 Corinthians text is explaining. *“And all of us, ... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.”*

That is what worship is meant to be, a time of intimate closeness to God so we are strengthened to face the messiness in life and tackle the needs of God’s children fortified, as Paul puts it, with *“such a hope, we act with great boldness”*

How do we come to worship each Sunday? It is hard to leave life at the foot of the mountain. What would happen if we really thought about meeting God face to face when we come to worship? Sometimes we come here out of routine or because we think we need to. Or maybe we come for the good music. Maybe we just want to come sit in a pew and escape life for a little while. And you know, these reasons aren’t bad, but coming to church to worship can be so much *more*. Worship is a place where we hear God’s voice, and experience God’s Grace. Our worship service is designed to take us to the mountain top with Jesus.

One commentator told about a young couple told him what worship meant to them. “They explained to me how important church had become for them. Whenever one of them could not make it – if, for instance, one of their children was sick – they’d do a quick two-minute drill to check in on the week they’d just been through and the week about to come to determine, as they said, “who needed church more.” “Church is what helps us make sense of our lives,” they explained, “it’s that pick-me-up that connects us with God and sends us back into the week.” (David Lose, In the Meantime)

Coming to worship, is climbing up the mountain with Jesus and being reminded that we are God’s beloved children, that God in Jesus’ cross and resurrection shows us just how much God loves us and that this love conquers all the junk we are faced with. And this transfiguring Love is what calls and equips us to step in and make a difference in the lives of those around us each week—after the mountain top.

When I participate in a Kairos Outside Weekend, we talk about this and prepare the guests of the weekend for coming down the mountain. We tell them they are going to be hit in the face with the junk of the world. And these women, all affected by incarceration one way or another, carry a lot of stuff. We make sure they understand that nothing has changed in the valley of their lives.

But what they have gained from this close encounter with God's love, will equip them to be in their messy lives with hope and boldness. Because that is what it is all about.

Listen to this song that we share with them. I know when I hear it, I walk down the mountain with hope. Transfiguration is about what happens after the mountain top.

Walk Down This Mountain by Bebo Norman.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1eheUw20jc>