

Transfigured  
United Church of Broomfield  
March 3, 2018

Luke 9:28-43a

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. 38 Just then a man from the crowd shouted, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. 39 Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It throws him into convulsions until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. 40 I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.' 41 Jesus answered, 'You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' 42 While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. 43 And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

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Have you ever been in a group of people where someone told a joke and everyone laughed except you? And you're thinking: "I don't get it. What's so funny?"

Or perhaps you are in a group of people where someone makes a point and everyone else nods in agreement—except you? And you are left thinking: "I don't have any idea what they are talking about."

Today's Gospel Lesson can be like that. And not just for us, I think it was like that for Peter, James and John as well.

Why did Jesus go through some sort of a meta-morphosis as He prayed on that mountain?

Why did Elijah and Moses appear and start talking to Jesus about "His upcoming departure"?

If you are wondering these things, you are not alone. There can be no doubt that this is a mysterious story. Scholars and theologians have all kinds of differing opinions or guesses or interpretations as to why this situation occurred in the first place.

Perhaps Jesus, preparing for His crucifixion, is getting a pep-talk from these two giants of the faith.

Maybe it happened in order for Peter, James and John to see that Jesus is, indeed, both human and divine and to hear God proclaim to them: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."

Think about it. There are going to be some really tough times ahead for these guys. They are going to watch Jesus die. Their faith is going to be tested in ways they never imagined possible. They are going to see evil at its worst. They are going to be scared to death. They are going to scatter. They are going to hide. They are going to deny ever knowing this Jesus they have come to love and devote their lives to. Things aren't going to be all rosy. There is a real world out there. Times are about to get horribly tough for them.

But through following Christ, even though it will eventually cost them their lives, God will use them as instruments to change the course of history.

"So come to the Mountaintop," says God. "I'm going to show you something that is going to take your breath away. I am going to give you a glimpse of the divine. I am going to show you—first hand—Who Jesus is."

Now, in order to get just a small taste of what a big deal this transfiguration thing is we have to try and put ourselves in Peter, James and John's shoes.

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Moses and Elijah were heroes of the Jewish faith. Peter, James and John had grown up hearing about them all the time.

Think of it this way, what if we all took a hike to the top of Pike's Peak and all of a sudden we saw John the Baptist, Peter, Paul and Jesus start talking to one of our Sunday school teachers?

What would that do to your faith? Would you be transfixed? Would you be scared to death? Would it be such an amazing experience that you would want to build a big church up there and never leave? Would you really feel like coming back down the mountain to Broomfield, Lafayette, or Westminster after something like that?

Would you want to go back to the brokenness, violence, poverty, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and the ugly reality of much of our world after something like that?

Peter, James and John were on the Mountaintop with Jesus. Nothing could hurt them up there. The pain of the world was suddenly in the distant past. All worries were forgotten for the moment. “Peter said, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever wanted to just go to your comfortable place, build a shrine and never leave? Have you ever wanted to just get away and stay away from the problems of this world—ignore them, perhaps. Ever wanted to put your hands over your ears and drown out all the noise?

Or, have you ever had such a mountaintop experience with God that you thought nothing could ever bring you down again? It was that good!

It’s important to have mountain-top experiences, but it’s not where we are going to stay if we are going to follow Jesus—if we are going to listen to the voice of God saying: “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” Because when we listen to the voice of Jesus, we hear Him calling us to become involved in the muck, messiness and misery of our world.

We hear God calling us to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed. We don’t hear God telling us to build shrines and sit on our duffs while people go hungry, while refugees are rejected, while gun rights are more valued than human rights and while any human being thinks they have the right to gather at a conference in the name of God and decide to exclude other human beings from God’s love.

We aren’t supposed to stay inside our buildings and argue over pews versus chairs while the city burns around us. But do we do this sometimes?

Do we sometimes build these fortresses for ourselves; these fortresses that cut us off from the outside world—from those who are suffering?

Do we get caught up in the small things while people go on living without Jesus, without hope, without love—without a witness?

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There are so many homeless people, hungry people and hopeless people. Do you know how many churches there are in Broomfield? Over thirty. Thirty churches in Broomfield alone. So, why do we have all these problems with so many churches?

Jesus’ ministry was hands-on, and it remains hands-on today. Jesus got involved in the craziness of people’s lives. Jesus went to the synagogue every Sabbath, but the rest of the time, he was with the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the criminals, the sick, the insane, the smelly, the dirty, the poor, the lepers, the outcastes, the ordinary everyday people.

Jesus chose to get involved in the lives of hurting people and get his hands dirty.

As followers of that Jesus guy we're asked to the same.

The Mountaintop is a great place to visit, but we are not supposed to live there. After their mountaintop experience with Jesus, we are told that Peter, James and John "came down from the mountain."

That's where Jesus leads us. If we follow, Jesus brings us to the places where our faith matters. He takes us to the places where our lives will make a difference. He brings us to people who need us. And that is because the glory of God's Presence and the pain of a broken world cannot be separated. Real faith cannot be separated from loving action.

As it says in 1st John 3:16-18: "This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. But if someone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but refuses to help—how can the love of God dwell in a person like that?"

The word "transfiguration" means metamorphosis. It means that a big change takes place. If we are following Jesus, if we are listening to Jesus we will not only see Jesus for Who Jesus truly is—the Son of God—but we will be transformed, changed, made new in the process.

Peter, James and John came down from the mountain, they found a father and a child gasping for life. Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. Peter, James and John found transfiguration happen within themselves—not so much on the mountaintop—but in the valley.

And so it is when we leave this safe sanctuary, we meet the distress of a community convulsed and mauled by the horrors of this world. We become transfigured as a congregation and as individuals when we reach out to those in need—when we rebuke the evil spirits of hunger, poverty, loneliness, isolation, darkness, and sin by offering food to the hungry, a drink to the thirsty, companionship for the lonely, clothes for those who need them, healing and love for the sick and the easy and simple gift of our loving presence with other.

"Christianity isn't a spectator sport. It isn't something to stamp on a resume. It is a life. And as we live it, we are to be light in a dark world. We are to be transfigured more and more into the image of Christ—through serving those in need, we are to proclaim Christ crucified and risen—by how we love."<sup>1</sup>

AMEN.

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<sup>1</sup> Sauer, Kenneth. "So what are we going to do about it?"