

Mountaintop changes

A sermon for Transfiguration, February 14, 2021

St. Andrew Lutheran Church - Franklin, Tennessee

Mark 9:2-9 – Pr. Michelle Kuhlman

I don't know about you, but I love to travel (when it's not made impossible by a global pandemic, that is.) I love seeing new places. There's always so much to take in. The sights, the sounds, the experiences. I have often found myself trying to capture everything on camera, in either video or pictures. I don't want to miss anything. But in the last several years, I have come to realize that in my rush to document everything around me, I actually end up missing out on the joy and wonder of the moment. What good does it do to have a thousand pictures of someplace if the only thing you remember about being there is holding your camera at just the right angle all the time? I've started trying to capture moments in a different way. I remind myself that I need to just be in the moment, to take in my surroundings. I try to remember how things look, how I feel, what's around me. Of course, I still take a lot of pictures, but they aren't my only source of memories.

Perhaps you've had the opportunity to venture to a mountaintop, hilltop, or some other beautiful vista in your lifetime. It can be breath-taking, can't it? You stand there and can't help but feel the vastness of God's good creation. Those moments are ones that will stay with you forever. What a way to encounter God!

Now it's time for us to consider other encounters with God.

We've come to the Transfiguration of our Lord. Doesn't that sound fancy? For starters, let's make sure everyone has an understanding of what transfiguration means. Transfiguration is the act of being transfigured, and according to Dictionary.com, to transfigure means to "change in outward form or appearance," or to "change so as to glorify or exalt." So what's the big change in this event? That would be Jesus on the mountaintop, glowing like a nightlight. It truly is an incredible experience for Peter, James, and John as they are standing there. Add in the words they hear from God about

listening to his beloved son, and their jaws could have been on the ground. If that's not enough, Elijah and Moses make an appearance as well.

It's pretty easy to understand Peter's impetuous idea to build three dwelling places or tents to house Jesus, Moses and Elijah. This is such an incredible sight to behold that he feels moved to do something to preserve it. I think this is Peter's version of taking a million photographs instead of just absorbing the moment.

There are multiple mountaintop events tied in with our texts today. In addition to this main event outlined in Mark, we can recall that Moses and Elijah both had their own mountaintop encounters with God. These were ministry and life-changing experiences.

Now, if we stop to consider the Transfiguration of Our Lord in the context of the church year, we see that it is a bridge of sorts between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent.

Think for a moment about Epiphany and the time that follows it. It's bookended by significant light events. A bright light (in this case, a star) reveals the infant Jesus, the light of the world. In the Transfiguration experience, Jesus is revealed in dazzling light. Jesus is identified as the beloved Son of God. Now take a look forward to Lent. Come along with me on this one. Transfiguration isn't the "official" beginning of the season but it's close. In this case, think about the mountaintop aspect. The disciples have the epitome of a "mountaintop experience." Jesus' divinity is shown. Move to end of Lent and consider what happens there. A different sort of mountaintop experience (and yes, we can debate the whole "mountain" thing – but for purposes of the point I'm trying to make, work with me.) Mountain, hill, let's agree that it was a higher up place. We **can** all agree that what happened at Golgotha changed everything. In Jesus, God redeemed all of humanity.

We have the distinct advantage of looking at our Gospel text today with both hindsight and foresight. We know where Jesus has been – preaching, teaching, healing, and calling his disciples to take up their cross and follow him. And we also know where Jesus is heading. His human life will end in the ultimate sacrifice for us in his death on the cross. (And be followed by the resurrection.) Once the disciples heard God's voice proclaiming Jesus

as his son, everything was going to be different. Life as a follower of Jesus was going to entail plenty of sacrifice on their parts as well. The intense reality of Jesus' purpose was starting to become clearer. This is a time for us to hold all of this knowledge in a tension of sorts.

These mountaintop encounters with God are enough to stop us in our tracks. And like Peter, we may feel the need to **DO** something in reaction to them. Of course, our faith ultimately does move us to action in a faithful response to all that God has done, is doing, and promises yet to do in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But what if we aren't meant to act in the heat of the moment, so to speak. What if a faithful response in this instance is to simply sit in awe – to just **BE** instead of **doing**? That concept can feel completely foreign in an age where we are extensively connected, and it can seem like we are “on” 24/7. We have instant access to information at our fingertips and can answer calls, text messages, and e-mail from almost anywhere. Perhaps there's a reason that one place you often can't get a phone signal happens to be up in many mountaintop areas.

As we approach the beginning of Lent, many people may be considering the long-standing tradition of giving something up. The chocolate, the wine, or, as in the case of one of my college roommates, the potato chips. Some people go without Facebook or other social media for Lent. Yes, this gives us a sense of doing without – of getting rid of something that isn't good for us or maybe something that we know takes up too much of our precious time. But I'd like for you to consider, perhaps, the more recent concept of taking **on** a discipline for Lent instead of giving something **up**. What if you made a commitment to spend time disconnected from everything except God? This is an ideal opportunity to spend time just being with God. Sit in awe at God's majesty, grace, and love for us. How might you encounter God when you stop to simply **be**? Stop moving a million miles a minute. Turn off the tech devices you feel tethered to. Take time with God. Pray. Sit. Take it all in. Look back and look forward. Listen. You may just find yourself changed.

Amen.