

2 Kings 2:1-13 ~ Mark 9:2-10
From Glory to Glory
Transfiguration of the Lord ~ February 11, 2024
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Introduction to Scripture

You've got to love Peter. Shoot from the hip, fly off the handle, jump out of the boat, "Mr. No-filter," Peter. We are going to get to spend some quality time with Peter this Lent. Our entire Lenten sermon series starting next Sunday will focus on him. It is titled, "*Wandering Heart: Figuring out Faith with Peter.*" And today's Transfiguration story is a great warm up!

You may recall last Sunday's story, back in Mark 1, when Jesus took Peter's fever-stricken mother-in-law by the hand, lifted her up, and healed her. Today we take a giant leap all the way from Mark 1 at the very beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, to Mark 9, where the story has just begun to turn toward Jerusalem and the shadow of the cross start to loom on the distant horizon. But today: you need to get out your sunglasses and apply your sunscreen. Today, you can see our white paraments on the pulpit, and around my neck pointing toward the razzle dazzle of God's sound and light show on the mountain of Transfiguration.

Don't forget to also pack flares and flashlights in your backpack. The flash of today's story is kind of like the finale at the end of a fireworks show on the 4th of July: Although it thrills us with its spectacular flourish, we know the finale signals the fireworks show is about to end. Soon we will be shrouded in darkness and smoke. So too our gospel story today, signals the turn. The transition. Yes, today is the transition, the last Sunday before Lent. In just three days, our sanctuary paraments will be dark and my robe will be black, to reflect the mood and meaning of our Lenten journey toward the cross. Today we start the transition.

You will note today's second scripture lesson (Mark 9:2) begins with the phrase "Six days later." That tells you something right there. Mark typically moves breathlessly from one scene to the next, employing his favorite word, "immediately," again and again as a bridge from one story to the next. And yet here it's six whole days later? What's up with that? Maybe something big, something different. What was six days ago? That was the day Jesus' had predicted his earthly end, what we call "his passion" and death on the cross for the first time. Jesus told his intimates, his besties, his 12 disciples that he, the Son of Man *must* undergo great suffering, be rejected, killed, and after three days rise again. His disciples were shocked, confused. Peter, who had just confessed Christ as the Messiah, rebuked Jesus, "No way, man. Not you. Not that." To which Jesus rebuked him saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" You may recall that story. It's unforgettable.

Now, six days have gone by since that dust up. And we are about to ascend the high mountain. I've given your sunscreen enough time on your skin to take effect because you're going to need it. And we need the message that came through the cloud from God to Peter, James, and John. It was a message to those scared, confused, overwhelmed disciples that day. And it is a message for us, today. Whatever mountain or challenge you came into worship today, wondering how on earth you will climb.

Sermon

How many times have you said something, *anything* to break the awkward silence. To fill the gap. Peter was reliably the guy to speak first. Probably not an introvert. Peter never had a thought that he didn't verbalize. And he was full of ideas. Like today. You just heard him. Up on the mountain when all of a sudden Jesus' skin and his clothes became weirdly luminescent, and then things got even weirder: Elijah and Moses, the long dead prophets, materialized and started talking to Jesus. Surely, Peter, James, and John, were shocked out of their sandals. They had no idea what was going on or what to make of it. So, Peter pipes up with something like: "Rabbi, this is amazing!! I know, let's build three booths, one for you, and one for Moses and Elijah. Wouldn't that be cool?"

What I'm drawn to this year is the *next* line in our gospel story. (Verse 6): "He did not know what to say, for they were terrified." There it is, this is where we can relate because I know we've all been there too—not knowing what to say. And we've been scared, terrified. Especially in times of transition. Moments of momentous change. Not knowing what to say or think. The ground shifts downward under you: a diagnosis, a death, a derailment of a relationship. Or it shifts upward: you learn to walk, to ride a bike, to drive a car. You become a parent, or a grandparent, you graduate from school, you start a new job, you retire, you move. You get the idea: as much as these transitions upward and downward can scare and stress us: they actually happen more often than we realize. And way more often than we want them to. Or would choose. This was true for Elisha, in our first scripture lesson, for Peter, and for us.

"He did not know what to say, for they were terrified." If this story of the transfiguration seems strange and confusing, it is. In fact, don't try to figure out the transfiguration. Honestly no one really knows what happened on that mountain. Or exactly why. We can be sure it was awesome, beyond the telling. Nor was Peter's idea about building booths all that crazy. Building booths or tabernacles for sacred entities was a thing in his tradition. The more I look at this story, the more I think that maybe we should actually *thank* Peter for his outburst. Because the very next thing that happens after his verbal outburst is the cloud overshadowing them, and the voice of God saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!"

This gift goes beyond the flash of light. Yes, this story on the high mountain is certainly a "grand finale" of an epiphany story: Look, open your eyes: "This is my Son, the Beloved." What came next was the three-word life lesson: Listen to him! Unlike the story of Jesus' baptism, where God is speaking to Jesus: this time the voice from the cloud is clearly for Peter, James and John: Listen to him! Three words for Peter, James and John. Three words for you and for me. Just imagine if we actually *did* this. Just imagine if we embraced awkward silences and recognized them as a sacred opening for Jesus to speak the word we need to hear.

Especially whenever we are experiencing a life transition. And honestly, who isn't transitioning in one way or another? Whether it is a change within our own physical body, or it's the body of a relationship, a family, our church body, our Marshfield community, our body politic as a state, a country, and our world. We may feel like "we've never been here before," or

"this is worse than ever." And as often as we hear these days someone on the media tell us something someone says or does is "unprecedented," I doubt it. Indeed, the deeper truth is here. In our Bible. This book, our Bible, is essentially the love story between God and us. Creator and Creation. It spectacularly shines and shimmers in these two strange stories, the one in 2 Kings about Elijah and Elisha; and the one in Mark 9 about Jesus, Peter, James, and John; chariots of fire, Jesus shining, avatars of Elijah and Moses glowing: God is with us. In the dark and in the fog. In the valley of despair and the mountain of exhilaration: God is for us. God has been with us since the dawn of creation. And will be. Today and tomorrow. And in between.

God stands ready to transfigure whatever transition you may be facing now: From glory to glory. Can you hear Christ calling there, being there, with you? I find a golden thread from the Elisha story to the Transfiguration story. Here it is: Did you notice how Elisha calls for silence, again and again? And so does God on the mountain of transfiguration: Listen. Listen to Him. We can see in these stories, the move from *awkward* to *awesome*. From *scared* to *sacred*. If we can allow the awkward silence to linger long enough so that God can speak.

We have added a few moments of silent reflection at the end of each session meeting for this purpose. Often when the meetings run long, and we finally get to this point on the agenda, I consider skipping it. My first impulse is, "Let's just get done with it." But I make us go ahead and do it anyway. And then from the silence an idea, a thought, an new observation, something emerges from that silence. Something important that would not have happened otherwise.

Throughout our Sundays in Lent we will add a little more silence during our worship to give us that gift of silence. Even if it seems awkward. Open your heart to it. Notice your breath. Don't we aren't going full Quaker here 😊 – we will add just 15 seconds to our two weekly points of silence: during our "Silent Confession to God" and the "Time for Silent Prayer and Reflection." And get ready to hear God's voice in a new way, perhaps. (Or look forward to Easter when we will go back to our usual intervals of silence.)

Beloved Community: God was, God is, and God will be with the next generation. You may be worried about the next generation. When we think about the health of our planet, our ecosystem, our geopolitical conflicts. In our own country and around the this world Jesus came to save. Here is the good news: God will be with them. God will raise up prophets in the next generation. That's what God does. Maybe from right here at FPC. Come to our Ash Wednesday service and let our next generation lead you in worship! Experience about 10 of our youth, our next generation, read scriptures, lead prayers, invite prayers for the thousands of children lost in Gaza, and impose ashes. Let God work through them to transfigure your Lent this year.

Between now and Wednesday, consider one thing you might do differently this Lent. That's from February 14 to March 31. Don't make it too hard! That's a long time. Trust me. If it's more breathing space you need, consider carving out just 5 minutes a day. I thought about promising you my sermons would be 5 minutes shorter, to give you those 5 minutes back. But

that seemed too hard... Try turning off your devices, TV or radio. And be still, or take a walk, inside or outside. Do jumping jacks, or the five-pointed star breath prayer.

If you have *too* much time on your hands, then consider adding an activity that will bring sheen and shine to your living space, to our community, our world. Write a note to friends and family you have fallen out of touch or out of favor with. Clean a closet, a drawer. Declutter a relationship that needs fresh perspective. God will lead you into what is right for you this Lent.

For now, I will end my sermon with the "Be still and know" prayer from Psalm 46:10a. A prayer you can take home and use to help you with your transitions. It will help you Listen to Christ in the midst of whatever you may be facing today. Or tomorrow.

Let us pray:

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still,

Be.

From Glory to Glory. Amen.