

## **Sermon on the Transfiguration**

**St. Luke/San Lucas 11 August 2024**

**Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:13-21, Luke 9:28-36**

God Our Creator,

Open our ears, that we may hear;

Open our minds, that we may understand;

Open our hearts, that we may love.

Amen.

Please be seated. Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Transfiguration. I had a sermon outlined and figured I'd spend some time polishing it up. But then, I took Godly Play training. Three days of learning how to present passages from our Scriptures, not as lessons, not as lectures, but as shared experiences in wondering. Fascinating training that I encourage all of you who can to take. Mind-opening, if a little hard on the knees. And so, after those hours looking at religious instruction from an entirely different point of view, I went home yesterday and started the sermon over again. I invite you into this sacred space, to come with me, to hear the story of the Transfiguration, and to wonder.

Jesus had been traveling with his disciples through the countryside, teaching and healing.

He was tired. He tried to get away in a boat, crossing the sea, but the people followed him.

He taught; he healed; he fed. And he was exhausted, yet the people still came.

So, Jesus left most of his disciples down in the valley, ministering to the people, while he climbed up to the mountaintop with Peter, James and John, to pray. While Jesus was praying, the disciples became sleepy (that seems to be a trend), when all of a sudden, they were startled by a great light. Jesus' appearance changed. His clothes became a dazzling white. And he was joined by two men, Moses and Elijah. The three of them stood there, talking.

Imagine being one of the disciples, Peter, James or John. After working all day down in the valley, assisting Jesus with ministry, you are then required to climb to the top of a mountain and stay awake while Jesus prays. Despite your best efforts, you begin to doze a bit when, boom, a light shines, Jesus' face changes, Jesus' clothes change, extra people—famous extra people—show up out of nowhere. It was surprising. It was confusing. It was overwhelming.

We often refer to the fight, flight or freeze reactions—impulses we humans have when we are overwhelmed, unprepared and unable to cope with the situation around us. But that leaves out one other common reaction—the babble impulse. You know the one. When faced with an unfamiliar situation, one where you don't know what to do or how to react, and you just start talking and talking and talking. Anything to fill up the silence, the empty space.

And that's just what Peter did: He was overwhelmed, and he started babbling away. Making suggestions for action. Let's build a dwelling. Let's do something, anything, to grab back control, to make this into something we can handle, something we can manage. To not be overwhelmed.

Luke's account even says that Peter kept talking, not knowing what he said. He wasn't making sense, to himself or anyone else. He was just talking nervously, to fill the space.

It's easy to poke fun at Peter. Let's face it, he does put his foot in his mouth with frequency. But how often do we, when we are overwhelmed, react as Peter did? How often do we start babbling? Saying something, anything to fill the silence.

How often, when faced with something different, something confusing, something overwhelming, how often do we react by searching out something familiar, by doing something we know how to do? How often do we, like Peter, engage our mouths and our hands before we put our minds and hearts in gear?

God's response came quickly, while Peter was still talking. A cloud overshadowed them and scared them even more. And from this cloud came a voice, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him." Listen to him. Listen.

In Godly Play, there is a practice called “making silence.” Not being silent, but making silence, building it piece by piece. Thoughtfully. Purposefully. Intentionally.

Making silence by quieting our bodies. Making silence by quieting our thoughts. Making silence by breathing slowly, in and out, in and out.

Opening our ears. Opening our minds. Opening our hearts. Letting the Spirit move through us.

God has given us peace, and calm, and silence. When our children are overwhelmed, when it’s all just too much, we encourage them to reach for God’s silence. We teach them techniques to search out God’s peace. Yet, all too often, we forget to use them ourselves.

At this time in our communal life, we’ve got a lot going on. We’re searching for a priest to walk with us. Many of us are being called upon to do things that we have not done before, or that we haven’t done in a long time, or that we haven’t done this way. It can be overwhelming. And it’s tempting, oh so tempting, to respond like Peter. To start babbling away. To start organizing, and building, and doing.

But sometimes, perhaps we’d be better off doing as God instructed Peter. Looking to God. Looking to God’s chosen. Listening to God. Listening.

Building silence. Building calm. Building peace.

And I wonder. I wonder, what can we learn from this story? I wonder, what is the most important part of this story? I wonder what part of the story is about me, where do I fit into this?

As we go out today, as we continue on with our daily lives, with our rector search, with our pastoral care, with our families and our work and our fun, I encourage us all to leave aside the babbling, the frenetic actions, the “we’ve always done it that ways.” Instead, let us travel together into a sacred space, a mountain top of clouds and prayer, a place to wonder, to listen, and to be at peace.

Amen.