

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

February 11, 2024 (Transfiguration of our Lord, Year B)
Mark 9:2-9
2 Corinthians 4:3-6

There's a story about a magician who was performing on an ocean liner. But every time he did a trick, the Captain's parrot would yell, "It's a trick. He's a phony. That's not magic." Then one evening during a storm, WHILE the magician was performing, the ship sank. Wouldn't you know it, the parrot and the magician ended up in the same lifeboat. For several days they just glared at each other, neither saying a word to the other. Finally, the parrot said, "OK, I give up. What did you do with the ship?"

It was too much for the bird to comprehend, even for a SMART bird. Peter too, on the mount of Transfiguration, simply could NOT comprehend what was happening. He was frightened, and he said the FIRST thing that came into this head.

We too have moments in life that are incomprehensible. Your first kiss is one of those moments. The birth of your children is one of those moments. Walking your daughter down the aisle is one of those moments. These are "MOUNTAINTOP" moments. And we're NEVER ready for them. Even if we EXPECT them, they change us in unexpected and irreversible ways.

A true story (I looked this up). A 33-year-old truck driver by the name of Larry Walters who was sitting in his lawn chair in his backyard one day wishing he could fly. For as long as he could remember he had wanted to fly, but he'd never had the time or the money or the opportunity to be a pilot. So he spent a lot of summer afternoons just sitting in his backyard in his lawn chair. One day Larry hooked 45 helium-filled surplus weather balloons to his chair, loaded up a large bottle of pop, a portable CB radio and a pellet gun to pop the balloons when he wanted to come down. He lifted off in his lawn chair expecting to climb a couple of hundred feet over his neighborhood. But instead, with 45 weather balloons, he shot up 16,000 and drifted through the approach corridor to the Long Beach Municipal Airport. A couple of shocked Delta and TWA airline pilots reported what appeared to be an unprotected man floating through the sky in a chair.

Later on, when asked by the press why he did it, Larry answered: "Well, you can't just sit there." Indeed you can't, Larry.

And when they asked him if he was scared, he answered, "Yes...wonderfully so."

Peter, James, and John might have answered the same way: Were you scared?
"Yes...wonderfully so."

There's ONE thing ALL mountaintop moments have in COMMON. They demand that we listen. These moments have something to SAY to us, something to TEACH us.

In WONDERFUL FEAR, Peter, as he so often did, said the wrong thing. This Transfiguration comes just six days and a few verses after Peter's little "Get behind me, Satan!" incident. We OFTEN find Peter babbling because he doesn't understand the SIGNIFICANCE or the MEANING of a moment.

But then, are WE any different? How often have we heard someone, maybe OURSELVES, say the WRONG thing at the WRONG time?

The Transfiguration teaches us that in these life-changing moments we need to be STILL and LISTEN. When Peter QUITS TALKING, a cloud appears and surrounds them, and the voice of GOD gives this instruction to Peter, James, and John: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to Him!"

It's the SAME thing God said at Jesus' BAPTISM, but THIS time God ADDS ONE thing: "Listen to him!" It's a command, a COMMANDMENT, the ONLY commandment GOD the Father gives in ANY of the Gospels. It's short and to the point, but it has a MOUNTAIN of meaning.

“LISTEN to Him! Listen to what he’s SAYING, not just what you WANT to hear.” Well, what HAS Jesus been SAYING? The LAST thing Jesus says before going up on this mountain is this: “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected ... and be killed, and after three days rise again.” And by the middle of the very NEXT chapter, he’ll say it AGAIN.

Peter and James and John DON’T listen and don’t UNDERSTAND Jesus’ words until AFTER the resurrection, but we, who live on the OTHER SIDE of the resurrection, have NO EXCUSE. God tells US to LISTEN, to hear and believe. That’s why this Transfiguration is the last Sunday before Lent every year. In this vision of the glory of God in Jesus, we’re given a stark reminder of just WHO IT IS that’s on his way to that cross on Good Friday. “This is my SON, the BELOVED; LISTEN to Him!”

In our second reading, Paul speaks to the HEART of the matter. He says that in Christ we have seen the light that shines out of the darkness. We have witnessed SPECTACULAR love and ASTOUNDING miracles. And that light, the SAME light that SHATTERED the darkness of a Judean night above the shepherds, the SAME light that ignited a star to lead the wise men to a new truth, the SAME light that Paul called “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” is the light that NOW shines in our HEARTS. The light and the glory of Christ is now WITHIN us.

The transfiguration wasn’t ONLY for JESUS’ sake; SEEING it, seeing His GLORY and MAJESTY is meant to transfigure US, to TRANSFORM OUR HEARTS.

In our LATER service today, we’ll sing (*earlier in our service, we sang*) the Battle Hymn of the Republic. There’s a line in there that says, “In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea, with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me.”

This GLORIOUS EVENT is meant to change YOU, in unexpected and irreversible ways. As Larry put it, “You can’t just sit there.” Christ’s light is shining in your heart for a reason. “LISTEN to him!” You may not know where’s he LEADING you, and that may be a little scary. But in the words of Larry, it’s “wonderfully so.”

The journey of Lent starts Wednesday night, with the Ashes. Friends, our faith DOESN’T mean strapping on 45 weather balloons, but you CAN’T just SIT there.

I’ll see you on Wednesday. Amen.