

Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead, New York
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The Transfiguration of Our Lord B ~ February 14, 2021
2 Kings 2:1-12, Psalm 50:1-6, Corinthians 4:3-6, Mark 9:2-9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. C: Amen

Lutheran Scholar and Pastor, Melinda Quivik says of our celebration today:

The Transfiguration stands between the Time after Pentecost, when we are learning to be church, and Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday, when we are thrust back into the hard truth that we are dust. The power of the Transfiguration is that it plants in our hearts and minds the brilliance of eternity on the mountain with the greatest prophets, emboldening us for the journey together as the body of Christ. The Transfiguration thus prepares us to come to terms with our humility, our soil nature, our utter dependence on God.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/transfiguration-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-mark-92-9-5>

This year has done a great deal to impress upon us how dependent we are on God, given the devastating effects of the pandemic. And yet, many people in our country seem to think that they can defy nature and ignore science by not taking precautions against infection.

This year we have experienced things in the political life of our country never before faced. And yet, hundreds of people, it seems, have been prepared to take over the government, as least for one afternoon. The events of January 6th underscore for me just how true it is that we are but dust.

But we're not there yet – this morning, we're still on the mountaintop, reveling in the dazzling light and then the appearance of Moses and Elijah. What an experience! No wonder Peter, James and John were terrified! We, who have not been up to the mountaintop, can hardly even imagine what it was like. What does it mean to be transfigured?

Pastor Quivik helps us to understand this, too. She states:

We might use the words “transfigure” and “transform” interchangeably, but there is a helpful distinction to keep in mind. To be transfigured is to be changed in outward form or appearance. Jesus’

transfiguration does not alter who he is but gives to those who see the changed visage a new understanding of him because they see him outwardly in a different light. When we speak of *transformation* we tend to mean a complete or essential change in composition or structure. Jesus on the mountain with Moses and Elijah is not transformed (changed inwardly) but transfigured before his disciples (shown to be other than [*they*] assumed). He is not made to have a new essential self but an appearance that conveys his standing in the company of Israel's greatest prophets.

Ibid., *emphasis mine*.

What can we take from this discipleship experience recounted to us, without our having known Jesus of Nazareth, the flesh and blood man? We have a brief time of contemplation, looking back and forward in our faith lives to consider the direction of those lives. A direction not chosen by us, but guided, led and pointed by God.

This season after Epiphany has shown us the connection between Jesus' baptism and his mission being fulfilled. What is the connection for us between our baptisms and our missions being fulfilled? Well, that's our life on earth, isn't it?

I recall a story I heard Presiding Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry recount from his boyhood. An elder directed his attention to a tombstone in a cemetery, to the inscription with birthdate and date of death. Between the two, is a simple dash. That dash, said the elder, is what it's all about – it's the representation of our life on earth, and how we live that life, day after day.

When I prepare a family for the baptism of a child, I always ask the parents and sponsors what it means to them to be baptized. More often than not, unfortunately, they don't really know what I'm talking about.

So I ask us, do we remember each day of our lives that we are baptized children of God? And does that recollection call us each day into obedience to God's will, to our own individual mission on earth?

We heard in the Old Testament lesson today about poor Elisha on the day when he would lose his mentor, who was so dear to Elisha that he called him "Father." (2 Kings 2:12.)

But it seems that Elisha understood his mission: first, to travel with Elijah, to serve him and learn from him, and then to take on the call of prophet, taking up Elijah's mantle. Because that's what he does, in the verses after our lesson ends. That action, of picking up the mantle, conveys Elisha's acceptance of his vocation and he continued to speak the word of the Lord to the people and to do works of power.

Jesus has left a mantle for each of us, too. We can't see it, but it was placed upon us with our baptisms, when God poured the Holy Spirit upon us and we were sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. As Paul told the Corinthians, "we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord... For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 5-6.)

We know what proclaiming Jesus Christ means: loving and serving others as if we were serving Jesus himself.

So part of our looking back and looking forward today and until Ash Wednesday is taking stock of our lives, determining who is the recipient of most of our time. For those of us who study and work, we are preparing and equipping ourselves to be of use to God. For many of us, the work that we do daily serves others who are more vulnerable than we are.

As we prepare to enter into our corporate and individual Lenten journeys, we can spend some time in thought and prayer, considering if it's time to adjust the content of our "dash." It may be time for us to spend more energy in benefitting others than ourselves, or to dedicate a larger portion of our day or week in study of scripture or prayer. These are disciplines that we will focus on more during Lent than we do in the rest of the year. So we're getting a head start on the next season of our lives in envisioning how God is working in our lives to take up the cross that Jesus promised for each of us who follow him, to lose our lives for Jesus' sake (Mark 8:34-35).

Let's pray. Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us, rather than making dwellings on a mountain top, find new ways to be of service to your people in our communities, helping to enhance their lives with the love, grace and abundance that you have provided for all in creation. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. **C: Amen**