

Order of Worship

Transfiguration Sunday, February 14, 2021

WELCOME

Hello God, thank you for this day.

It's 9:03 and we need your help.

**Guide us by your Holy Spirit to reach new people,
Connect us all through Christ's love, and
Empower us to love and serve others. Amen.**

PRELUDE

Deo Gracias

P. Cattaneo

CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 50:1-6

UMH 783

HYMN 2103

We Have Come at Christ's Own Bidding

HYFRYDOL

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN 173

Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies

RATISBON

SCRIPTURE

Mark 9:2-9

MESSAGE

Rev. Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 2102

Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Gory

NETTLETON

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Voluntary #1

J. Beckwith

PRAYER CORNER

We lift up Andrea Anderson who is staying at Aspirus Hospital while being diagnosed and treated for severe hip and pelvic pain and weakness. Lord, give her comfort and hope as you give her medical team knowledge and wisdom to best care for her.

As a child growing up near Madison, I remember looking forward to our trips up to Athens to visit my dad's side of the family. Rib Mountain was the landmark that assured me we were getting closer to Uncle Fritz and Aunt Mary's farmhouse. Now I get to see that peak every day and hike on it often in warmer weather. I'm not very graceful on skis, so it's better I stay off the mountain in winter.

Even though Rib Mountain is technically a big hill, most of the Upper Midwest would call it our most glorious mountain. There's something inspiring about being near or on a peak, which is probably why we call the special times of our life "mountain-top" experiences. People of all cultures and times have felt closer to a divine presence on mountains. The expansive views of the earth below give us a higher perspective, and the height makes us feel closer to heaven.

In our gospel story today, Jesus brings the inner circle of disciples up a mountain with him. Peter, James, and John are known for having a lot of initiative and ambition, which are essential qualities in mountain climbers. Starting from the area around the Sea of Galilee, there are two possible mountains they likely went to. In 348 AD Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem decided he favored Mt. Tabor, which then became the site of the Church of Transfiguration. It is 11 miles west of the Sea of Galilee and much easier to build a church on top of this mountain. However, Mt. Hermon, Israel's tallest and snow-covered mountain is more likely the site of the Transfiguration. Biblical scholars now believe this mountain, whose melting snow flows 43 miles south into the Sea of Galilee, is where Jesus brought his intrepid explorers to encounter Moses, Elijah, and himself in divine glory.

So what's the significance of Moses and Elijah? Were they ghosts, zombies, angels, or holograms? All of that will probably remain a mystery until we can ask God when we get to heaven. We do know that Moses and Elijah were key figures in Jewish history and life. Moses represented God giving the Law, particularly the 10 commandments, as a code of ethics for how to love God and love people. Where did God give this to him? On a mountain! What happened? God's glory shone so brightly on and through Moses that his face glowed and frightened the people waiting at the bottom of the mountain.

Elijah represented the Prophets, who God would speak through to bring people back from following their own destructive ways and lead them to loving and serving God and one another again. Where did God reassure Elijah that he was speaking faithfully? On a mountain!

The “Mountain Moment” for Moses was about 1440 BC, and for Elijah it was about 840 BC. That mountain was not Mt. Hermon nor Mt. Tabor, but much further south in the Sinai Peninsula. It is called Mt. Sinai in some places, and Mt. Horeb in other places, but scholars are pretty sure it is one mountain with two names. Moses and Elijah are two people, 600 years apart, who encountered the same God on the same mountain with two names. They are brought together with Christ.

In Christ, two major concepts come together for us as well. The Law (Moses) and Prophets (Elijah) are joined and fulfilled in Jesus. As Jesus taught, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”* (Matthew 5:17). He said those words on what is now called the Mount of Beatitudes, which is a big hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

Back to the Mount of Transfiguration, we can imagine ourselves alongside Peter, James, and John. Supernatural light is emanating out of not only their friend and teacher, Jesus, but also out of centuries-old legends Moses and Elijah. What is their response? Peter offers to build Jesus, Moses, and Elijah three dwellings that are usually translated as “tabernacles” in Greek. This is not an impulsive reaction or crazy idea. It was an annual Jewish festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, that inspired Peter to respond like that.

But God responded to Peter with a voice from a cloud, *“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”* (Mark 9:7). This is not a rebuke of Peter, but God’s loving voice helping Peter, James, John, and each of us to understand something important. God had filled the original Tabernacle in the wilderness of Exodus, and later the Temple in the Promised Land, with his glory. Now God is filling Christ, and each of us, with his glory. What God formerly revealed through the Law and the Prophets in the Tabernacle is now being revealed and fulfilled in Jesus.

The disciple John, transformed at Jesus’ Transfiguration, describes Jesus as God “tabernacling” among us. In John 1:14 he writes, *“And the Word became flesh and **lived** among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”* The word the NRSV translates as *“lived”* among us is more accurately *“tabernacled”* among us. God, the Word (declared in the Law and spoken through the Prophets), came to dwell with us as Christ both then and now. Peter, James and John didn’t need to build any tabernacles. God already did that, and was showing them that his Beloved Son, Jesus, is our safe shelter when we listen to him.

Peter also wrote about his experience at the Transfiguration:
“For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. – 2 Peter 1:17-18

The Greek word “glory” is *doxa*, the root of the words *doxology* (“glory words”) and *orthodoxy* (“true glory”). The Hebrew words translated as “glory” in the Old Testament (the Law and the Prophets) are *kabod*, which means “weighty” or “heavy” and *shekinah*, which means “dwelling”. Our imaginations may think of glory as being sparkly, and ethereal, but it may be more biblical to think of glory as God’s presence dwelling with us in the weight of daily living. As our New Testament reading in 2 Corin. 4:6 says, *“For it is 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.”*

A big part of the heaviness of life is death. We naturally avoid it for ourselves, do our best to protect others from it, and grieve deeply for our beloved family and friends when they die. The words “they’ve gone on to glory” bring some comfort, knowing that there are no more tears, pain, or sorrow in God’s eternal dwelling. Our Transfiguration story of glory ends with the word “dead” as well: *“Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”*

Dr. Melinda Quivik wisely summarizes, *“Jesus has embraced his identity as one who will die and be raised. He signals the journey ahead that will be coming when he and his disciples have left the mountain. It is one thing to have had... “a mountaintop” experience with Jesus up in the clouds where everything is brilliant, but it is not the be-all-and-end-all. The reason...is for the church, the disciples, to realize their crucial work in the world: to accompany Jesus to the cross, to take up our crosses, to die in order to live.”*

Will you welcome the glory of God to dwell in and through you? Will we glorify God together in life and even death? If so, sing this verse in our closing song by Thomas Troeger especially loudly:

***Lord, transfigure our perception with the purest light that shines
and recast our life’s intentions to the shape of your designs,
til we seek no other glory than what lies past Calvary’s hill
and our living and our dying and our rising by your will.***