

Mountaintop

By: Penny Holste

February 15, 2015. Pastor Penny's sermon today is on the Transfiguration of our Lord from the perspective of Peter, and on the risks we may take as we follow Jesus.

*** Transcript ***

We begin this morning in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Poor Peter. The last thing he wanted to be doing was to be trudging up that mountain behind Jesus. Jesus has said we need to come away, we need to get away. We need to go up where it's quiet. But Peter wanted to stay down in the towns and keep working. It was the work that really gave Peter energy. He loved walking into a brand new village with Jesus and the other disciples. People would come up and mob Jesus. "Rabbi! Rabbi!" they would call. And then he and the other disciples would do crowd control to make sure that everyone had their opportunity to touch Jesus and be healed. And the best thing, the most amazing thing for Peter, was when Jesus sent them out, the disciples, two by two into the villages — and they discovered that they too had the power to heal. Peter had never felt so validated, never felt so important, never had such energy. He loved that work. He didn't even like to stop to listen to Jesus teach.

And the last time that Jesus taught them, six days earlier, Peter and Jesus had had a fight. Jesus had been teaching the disciples and he said, I will have to be killed. I am going to be killed. And Peter thought that was the most ridiculous thing he had ever said. Jesus was popular. Everyone loved Jesus. And if he had a few enemies, I mean the people were not going to let someone hurt Jesus. And besides that, when Jesus said that, there was just a little bit of fear in Peter that it could be true. And the thought of losing Jesus... what would happen to them? What ministry would Peter have? Who would he be? A fisherman again, without Jesus. And how could they stand the idea of losing their good friend?

So because Peter thought it was a ridiculous thing for Jesus to say, and because he was just a little bit afraid it could be true, he scolded Jesus. And then Jesus turned on him. And he called Peter a devil, and he said that Peter had been tempting him to do the wrong thing. And those words, six days later, still haunted Peter as he trudded up that mountain. They still hurt. They still made him feel afraid. They still made him a little angry. And he was afraid that when they got to the top of the mountain, there would be another teaching session. But little did Peter know that the experience he would have on that mountain would change his life. Because when they got up there, Jesus didn't begin teaching. Jesus didn't say a word. Instead, Jesus was transformed in front of them. It was as if through every pore of Jesus' body he was emitting light. He was glowing. And then Peter saw two figures with Jesus, two men that somehow instinctively Peter recognized as these men from ancient history, the ancient history of his faith.

One of them was Moses, the giver of the Ten Commandments. Moses, whose words Peter had memorized in synagogue school. There he was! And with him was Elijah, that great prophet they had learned about who had the courage to stand up against Queen Jezebel. And they were talking to Peter's friend Jesus! It was as if the whole past of Peter and all he had learned was coming into the present, and all under the glow of the approval and the glory of God. He wanted to capture that moment. He didn't want it to ever end. So he said, let's build three shelters, one for each of you. But no sooner had he said that than they disappeared and he was hidden in a cloud. And then he heard a voice — instinctively he

knew whose voice it was — then he heard the voice of God saying two things he would never forget.

"This is my, Son the Beloved." Beloved, Peter thought. God is calling Jesus, my friend who looks like me, beloved. In all his life, Peter had learned about God, had worshipped God, had known that God was strong and to be worshipped and feared, and that they prayed that this strong God would deliver them from Rome. But he had never really thought of the word "love" with God. And here was God saying he loved Jesus, a man like Peter. But as he was basking in the glory of that thought, the next word of God came to him and hit him like a punch in the chest. Because God said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." Listen to him. And Peter knew those words were meant for him. "Listen to my son." Peter knew that when Jesus said something, it was the word of God. Peter knew at that moment that what Jesus predicted — that Jesus would have to die and that the disciples too would face hardship — that that was true.

When he came down from that mountain Peter was a different man. He had a sense of foreboding, because now he knew that Jesus and he would be facing hardship. But because of that experience, because he heard the voice of God, because he saw what he saw, it was covered over with a sense of peace — that whatever he had to face, Jesus would be alongside. Jesus would have been there beforehand. And whatever he had to endure, it would be under the shadow of the approval and the protection and the love of God.

As followers of Jesus, we really never know what he will lay on our hearts to do, what risks we will be asked to take. My great aunt and her friend Patty (we called her) never married. They lived together in a big house in Minneapolis, and we invited them of course to every family gathering. And every Christmas they would come with an almost complete box of candied fruit, and they would say this was a gift sent to us by our Japanese-American friends who live in California and it was too much for us. So we took a few pieces out, but we brought the rest for you. And every Christmas they would bring that box with the same explanation — that it came from their young Japanese-American friends in California. And we always wondered, who were these people and what were they doing in California? And why did they keep sending my aunt and her friend gifts? We never knew the answer in their lifetimes. My aunt was the first one to die, and some years later her friend Patty. And it was at Patty's memorial service that we heard the story. Well, there were two young Japanese-American women working in Minneapolis, and somehow they had become friends with my aunt and her friend Patty. And then the second world war broke out, and my aunt and Patty, who was a devout Christian, heard about all the Japanese-Americans on the West Coast that were being torn away from their jobs and their homes and put in internment camps. And they didn't want that to happen to their friends. So they invited their friends to come and live with them, and basically they hid them for the entire duration of World War II. My mother and father were invited occasionally to have Sunday dinner with them during the war. They never knew, as they sat down in the dining room having dinner, that upstairs there were these two young women hiding to keep out of danger.

So we really never know what God may lay upon our hearts, what risks we may take as we follow Jesus. We may find that we're risking our precious time as we get in extended conversations with someone at school or someone at work, who just needs a listening ear, and so we listen. We may find that God is calling us to take risks with our money to help someone, not knowing if they're really going to use our money properly or if we really have enough to share. We might find that God is asking us to risk our comfort and to stand up and work for justice for people who are very different from us, either in class, or in race, or in sexual orientation. And all these risks are scary. It may seem hard, but we have been to the mountain and we have heard the words of God and we have heard about Jesus. And so if we let those words they, like Peter, will change us. And we will find that yes, we may have a sense of

foreboding sometimes for what it means to be a Christian. But that, overshadowing that sense of fear, like Peter, is a sense of peace, that whatever God is asking us to do, Jesus will be walking beside us. In fact, Jesus will probably have done it before us.

And more than that, as we walk behind him, as we follow Jesus we will have that sense of abiding joy — of knowing that we are serving Jesus, who walked down that mountain so many years ago, and continued walking to Jerusalem and gave his life, so that we would have life — the joy of knowing that we serve him, and we serve God, who brought Jesus back to life, so that he could fling open the doors of the kingdom and say to each of us: welcome, come in. Now you are my beloved, the beloved sons and daughters of God.

Amen.

*** Keywords ***

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