

Everything Changes

By: Penny Holste

February 11, 2018. The Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain gave the disciples a glimpse of the love that God the Father had for his Son. They also saw Moses and Elijah, revered prophets who had mountaintop experiences of their own. Pastor Penny preaches today on this story, and on how when we come that close to God, the impossible becomes possible and everything changes.

*** Transcript ***

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

Maybe some of you are like this: the first preset on the radio in my car is a news station. The second is a music station. And I usually start by listening to the news. But when it gets too much, too frustrating, too many outrageous things, too sad, then I push the music button. And inevitably I'm quickly transported out of the problems of the world, and out of my problems, into a place that is a lot more full of joy and hope. And I think that this strange story that we hear in the gospel this morning, that we call the Transfiguration, is meant to do just that for us: to transport us out of what we're dealing with and give us a glimpse of a place of hope and joy. Because on this Sunday before Valentine's Day God invites us, as the disciples were invited so long ago, to be witnesses of God the Father giving really a valentine to God the Son, demonstrating in the clearest way possible how much the Father loves the Son.

And that love spills over into our lives as well. It was very clear that God wanted the disciples to be there and witness the Transfiguration. It could have been an event just for Jesus, but it wasn't. He invited Peter, James, and John to go with him. And it was clear that God wanted them to see something. When they got there on that mountain, suddenly Jesus' appearance was changed. He was dazzling white, or in the Greek he was gleaming and glowing as only a heavenly body could. You know, on earth we like to make things gleam and glitter if they're important to us: engagement rings, little girls' princess dresses are very glittery these days, new cars. That's a sign that they're important to us. Well, how much better, what a perfect way for the Father to show the disciples how much he loved Jesus, than to change Jesus, to transform him before their very eyes into a heavenly creature.

God didn't only want the disciples to *see* the Transfiguration though. God also wanted them to *experience* it. And so when they were on the top of the mountain they were enveloped in a cloud. And God wanted them to hear it as well, and so out of the cloud came a voice -- God's voice -- saying words that actually God had said at Jesus' baptism. Nobody heard them but Jesus, that time. But now the disciples hear the words "This is my Son, the Beloved." Clearly God wanted the disciples to hear and see and feel this Transfiguration, this opportunity to be transported out of their normal situation and catch a glimpse of this love and this peace. They were in a privileged place when they were on the top of the mountain for another reason too: as they looked around they saw two of the most famous prophets in the Jewish religion. They saw Moses and Elijah, both of whom had their own mountaintop experiences where God spoke to them. Moses was on Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments in one of the conversations he had with God. And Elijah was at Mount Horeb when God conversed with him. And interestingly, many people feel that Mount Horeb is just another name for Mount Sinai. So they were on the same mountain possibly.

When a person comes that close to God everything changes, and what seems impossible beforehand

becomes possible. And so these two prophets, when they had their mountaintop experiences, were changed. When they came down from the mountain they were able to do things they didn't think they could before. They didn't horde this new relationship they had with God. It energized them to serve others. Moses, for instance, came down the mountain to encounter mutiny. While he was up there getting the Ten Commandments, the children of Israel had turned away from God. They'd created that golden calf symbol of fertility and power, and they were worshiping it. Moses had to take on his own brother Aaron to get the children of Israel turned back to God. Elijah, before he talked to God, cowered in a cave, he was so afraid of Queen Jezebel who was after him. But after he spoke with God, he had the courage to face her and to challenge her cult of Baal against God.

The disciples, that day in Transfiguration Day, they come down from the mountain too. And we sense that Peter comes reluctantly. He seems to want to prolong the experience. He says oh, this is so good to be here. Let's build some shelters. He's kind of babbling in his excitement and his fear. But you have to wonder why. Why is Peter reluctant to come down? Could it be that he knows that when he gets down from the mountain he will have to face something he doesn't want to face? Maybe that's why the last words they heard on that mountain, the last words that God spoke (and God was speaking to them, not to Jesus) were, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." Listen to him. That's what God said. What were they supposed to listen to? What were the disciples supposed to listen to? What words had Jesus spoken that they weren't hearing?

Just before this experience of the Transfiguration, Jesus had revealed to the disciples that he would have to suffer. He would be rejected by the religious leaders. They would put him to death and then he would rise again on the third day. And Peter wouldn't listen. Peter wouldn't hear it. Peter scolded Jesus. Maybe we can understand. Maybe Peter thought well, you're the Holy One of God. You can't suffer. God's above all this. Maybe we can understand that, because I think that's our temptation as well: to say surely I don't have to take on the burdens of everyone else. Surely God doesn't want me to take risks, God doesn't want me to be uncomfortable. Surely if I just take care of myself and my family, that's good enough. Isn't it? Can't I just turn off that news channel and never listen to it again? Because after all, some of those things just seem so impossible.

Well here is Jesus' valentine for us. That is, Jesus knew what was at the bottom of the mountain, but he came down. Jesus, who belonged to the sphere of the glimmering of hope and joy and love, came down and suffered and died and rose for us. And I believe that's why we have been invited into this story this morning: to be reminded that we too have heard God's voice. We've heard it through this particular ritual and rite, this entrance rite into God's kingdom. We've heard it through our baptisms. That's the way God has been able to convey to us those same words: you are my beloved daughter, you are my beloved son, and I will be with you, and I will be with you to the end.

So when it feels like we are in a stormy time in our world, when it feels like we're overwhelmed with everything that's going on, Jesus' love -- God's love -- is the light that we look to. And when it feels that our personal lives are dry, our need of energy when things aren't going well or they're falling apart, and we feel like our personal lives are in a desert, it's God's love that's the beacon that we look to and that will guide us through. Jesus brought us close to God. And when you've been close to God, that changes everything. And even what seems impossible becomes possible.

Amen.

*** Keywords ***

2018, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, Pastor Penny Holste, Mark
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