

# Trusting a Changing God in a Changing World

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February 27, 2022. In today's gospel reading we witness Jesus being transfigured, and hear that Peter suggested trying to capture what had happened, so he could understand it, recreate it, and make sure it wouldn't be lost. We humans like the familiar, the predictable, the understandable. But the truth is that life is always changing, and we are always changing with it.

Reading: [Luke 9:28-43a](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

I was in a workshop on anti-racism this week that was provided by the Synod, and one of the facilitators said something — not once, but several times — that really got me thinking. They said, “In this world that seems to be changing faster and faster, and calling on us to keep up with those changes, we can be comforted by the fact that God never changes. God was, and is, and ever shall be, the same.” God never changes.

And then, on this final Sunday before Lent begins, in the gospel, we witness Jesus being transfigured — experiencing a complete change of form or appearance — in front of our eyes. I reflected on all the ways God reveals themselves throughout scriptures — a burning bush, parting waters, a nursing mother, a pillar of cloud, a voice from heaven, a whisper, just to name a few. And I wonder, if it is true that God never changes, what does that mean? And if God does change, how can we trust God, if we don't know how they will show up, if we can't even understand her?

We humans like the familiar, the predictable, the understandable, don't we? I certainly do. I learned long ago that my favorite way to control things, to feel safe, to cope with things that felt beyond me, is to understand them, categorize them, put them safely in a box that I can analyze from a distance. I will admit to spending a fair amount of time doing this since we entered into a world of pandemic two years ago. Does anyone else relate to that?

The disciples, after witnessing the amazing mountaintop scene, seem to want to do this too. As soon as it is over and Peter has recovered his speech Peter says, “It is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Let's try to capture what happened, so we can understand it, recreate it, and make sure it won't be lost. Theologian Debbie Thomas writes in her blog *Journey With Jesus* this week:

“The problem in the Transfiguration story is that as soon as Peter experiences a spiritual high, he tries to hoard it. What I hear in his plan to 'make dwellings' is an understandable but misguided attempt to contain, domesticate, protect, and process the sublime. To harness the holy. To make the fleeting permanent. To keep Jesus shiny, beautiful, and safe up on a mountain. After all, everything is *so good* up there. So clear. So bright. So unmistakably spiritual. Why not stay forever?”

In our desire for the familiar, predictable, and understandable, we often do the same thing. When we have an experience of God in worship or on retreat that feels powerful or sublime, or hear an exquisite performance, or perform a piece of music perfectly, or create a work of art that somehow, miraculously comes out even better than we could have imagined, or go on a hike and find ourselves in a place that seems to be surely be where God lives... who doesn't want to stay there forever?

The sacred truth of life is that it is always changing. The sacred truth is, *we* are always changing. How we see the world, how we see God, and how we understand ourselves changes over time. A young adult realizes their parents are human, after all. An addict admits after years of struggle that they need help. An LGBTQIA person embraces the beautifully unique person they were created to be, claiming gender or ways of loving and living for perhaps the first time. One comfortable in their understanding of God comes to realize that God is far bigger than they had ever thought. Transfiguration, beloveds, is not just for Jesus, but for all of us. Transfiguration means that the Spirit is never done transforming us, revealing us more fully. Change, beloveds, is not only unavoidable, but is part of God's creative work in our lives.

In the end, the voice of God is enough for Peter to set aside capturing Jesus' moment of transformation. Having failed to encapsulate the mountaintop, the disciples tell no one what they have experienced. They come back down from the mountain, after all, to the world that is not always shiny, beautiful, and safe. They return to an occupied land on a road that in a few short weeks will lead from Transfiguration, to Jesus' death on the cross.

In our time, we witness the gross injustice and horror of the attack and invasion of Ukraine by a dictator that has already brought death. A war is unfolding, the likes of which has not been seen since World War II. We as people of faith, with leaders around the world, are faced with the question of how we can contribute not just to an empty peace, an absence of war, but God's justice and mercy in this world, and especially for the people of Ukraine, whose autonomy, dignity, and very lives are being treated as pawns in a deadly game of corrupted power.

At times like this, it may feel that when we leave the mountain, we leave God behind too. It may help in those times to remember that when the disciples left the mountain, Jesus walked with them, down the road into the broken world below. For us in our day, we can know that God is present in this world, even in the midst of violence and war. Jesus walked with them. Debie Thomas reflects on the return from the mountain:

“God is *just as* present, active, engaged, and glorious down in the valley as God is in the visions of saints, clouds, and shadows that Peter experienced in the high places. In fact, what Peter eventually learns is that the compassionate heart of God is most powerfully revealed amidst the broken, the sinful, the suffering, and the despairing. The kingdom of God shines most brightly against the backdrop of the parent who grieves, the child who cries, the 'demons' who oppress, and the disciples who try but fail to manufacture and capture the holy. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. God's beauty is best contained in broken vessels.”

Today we celebrate, in the midst of all else that is going on, just a few of the leaders in our own community who have ministered among us as council members for the last year, and those who we have chosen to minister among us for the next year. Family of Christ Lutheran, we experience in many ways the moments of clarity, beauty, safety, and joy of the mountaintops, and we and our council walk together in those transfiguration moments.

And, as Peter and the disciples discovered, we are called down from the mountaintops, with newly opened hearts and spirits, to follow Jesus, witness God present, active, engaged, and glorious, and embody love and mercy in the ordinary, sometimes broken world of sacred, everyday life in our neighborhoods and communities. We as people of faith are called to stand against evil and injustice wherever it manifests, whether in our own backyard or in Ukraine. We are called to continually seek

the peace that can only come when God's justice prevails for all people.

We are, council members, staff, every one of us followers of Christ, called to journey through the many transfigurations and transformations of our lives, as we live in a world that continually changes around us.

It may not be true that God never changes. The good news of the transfiguration is this: in a world that just won't stop changing, as we ourselves change day by day, we can trust God not *in spite of*, but *because* God is moving and changing right along with it. Peter and the disciples witnessed it on the mountaintop, and we can see it in our own lives. In the midst of all the seeming chaos, what will never change is God's unfailing presence and unbounded love.

Thanks be to God.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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