

Sunday, March 3, 2019  
Rev. Jessica Paulsen  
FPC, Corning  
Exodus 34:29-35  
Luke 9:28-43a

### Listen to Him

The Transfiguration! It's another one of those days in the church year that I enjoy celebrating. It marks the end of the first season of ordinary time--from epiphany until now--and so is always the last Sunday before Lent.

But what is the Transfiguration? What do I mean when I say we're celebrating the Transfiguration? The dictionary defines the word transfiguration as "a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state" which is what we see happening to Jesus in our passage today. He is transformed. An interesting thing to note--all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record the transfiguration which tells us it was an important part of the story of the life of Jesus.

But what does it mean? To discover that, we look more closely at what we're told happened. Jesus goes up a mountain to pray, but he doesn't go alone. He chooses Peter, John, and James to go with him. While up on the mountain praying, Jesus changes--his clothes become dazzling white and his face shines and Moses and Elijah appear alongside him and they speak of what is to come--what he will accomplish at Jerusalem. This is often considered the moment when Jesus is fully defined and claimed as who he is--the Son of God--he shines in all his glory and Peter, John, and James are there to witness it.

They have the first mountaintop experience, as it's sometimes called. You know those mountaintop experiences--when you feel so close to God, and everything seems wonderful and fabulous, and you can just about see Jesus shining before you. This is where the idea of a

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mountaintop experience comes from--because Peter, John, and James are there for the transfiguration.

And they think it's great! And we'd probably agree. Mountaintop experiences can be pretty amazing. Peter thinks it's so wonderful and so good that he wants to stay up there on the mountain saying to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Which most of us can probably understand--it can be really nice to bask in God's glory and presence up on the mountain.

But Jesus doesn't stay on the mountain. We get the experience of God's glory, hearing God say, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!" and then we must come down the mountain. Now here's another interesting point as we work to understand the Transfiguration--I mentioned it's depicted in all three of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), well each time, in all three tellings of the Transfiguration, it is followed by this text of Jesus healing a boy with a demon.

So Jesus is up the mountain, basking in God's glory, and then comes down the mountain and heals a young boy. Often, this is understood as reminding us that we cannot stay on the mountain. The understanding that Jesus isn't solely in our mountaintop experiences, but also in the valleys. Or if we look at Peter, the reminder that we can't stay on the mountain because there is work to do in the valley, out in the world.

And those are all valid and important interpretations of the Transfiguration--the declaration of Jesus as the Son of God, the placing of him in line with the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah), as well as a reminder that we can't stay on the mountain. But this year, I read an essay that focused on this text pairing--focused on the fact that the story of the Transfiguration always ends with Jesus coming down the mountain and healing a boy. This morning, I also want

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to offer you some of the thoughts and words from that essay, partly because it has stuck with me as I work to understand this event in the life of Jesus, but also because we can't remove biblical texts from their context. The context of the experience on the mountain is that is coupled with the experience in the valley and Debie Thomas has some interesting things to say about this pairing.

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