

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV

Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: February 11, 2024, Year B, Transfiguration

Text: Mark 9:2-9

Title: What did Peter See?

Focus: The congregation experiences the transfiguration and the ministry of Jesus through the eyes of Peter. We are invited to reflect on how we ourselves see and encounter Jesus.

Presentation: I presented the sermon as a monologue offering Peter's perspective on the Transfiguration. I started at the pulpit/ambo for the opening, then stood on the in front of the chancel steps or the Communion table as I assumed the role of Peter. At the close of the monologue, I returned to the ambo and introduced the reflection questions.

Gospel Reading Mark 9:2-9

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As 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.

Opening: Experiencing God

Where or when have you encountered Jesus in a powerful way? Is that an experience that you could describe to another person? Could you explain what happened, what you thought and felt, and why that was so powerful?

Maybe *explaining* something like that is hard to do. It's hard to find words to express a transformative experience. Maybe it's the kind of thing for which you would say, "Well, you really had to be there."

The Transfiguration of Jesus presents him as a brilliantly glowing holy figure. The setting is not so much to be figured out as it is to evoke a sense of wonder or appreciation. So, let's approach the story as something to be appreciated and pondered, rather than explained or figured out. With that in mind, here's a look at the Transfiguration of Jesus through the eyes of Peter. . .

Peter recalls the amazing experience of witnessing the Transfiguration of Christ¹

As we came down from the mountain, James, John and I, we were still shaking. I was so confused and trembling so much that I kept stumbling and John would reach out a hand to steady me.

Jesus had told us not to say anything to anyone else about it, not to the rest of the twelve, not to anyone, until after he was 'raised from the dead'. But we couldn't help discussing it among the three of us--James, John, and I. What on earth did Jesus mean?

He'd been saying some strange things recently. In a way, it was easier to accept what he did than what he said. I mean, the healings, casting out demons, making people well and whole: who could disagree with that?

The crowds loved him, they followed us everywhere. It was difficult to get away from them – if he wanted to spend time with us alone, the twelve, he had to take us away to a mountain top or some out-of-the-way place... but even then, they would sometimes they'd run ahead of us. And if Jesus wanted to be by himself, he'd have to rise long before dawn; sometimes we'd wake and find him gone.

He was doing so much good, the people said he must be a prophet: You know, like John the Baptist or Elijah, the one who was to herald the coming of the kingdom, what we'd been waiting for, for so long. But I'd seen this man, we'd all spent so much time with him, the twelve of us, and especially James and John and I. We'd seen him close up, watched his every move, shared every meal, seen him when he was tired and weary, yet still willing to heal those who pressed in on him in the crowd—people who begged him to come and heal their son, their daughter.

Over the weeks and months, it dawned on me: he wasn't a forerunner of the one who was to come, he was the one: the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. So, when he surprised me by asking me directly, "Who do you say that I am?" I blurted it out: I told him he was the Christ.

He seemed pleased, but then he did something odd: he told us not to tell anyone else. And then, he started saying the weird stuff: that he would suffer at the hands of men, that he would be rejected by the religious authorities, that he would be killed and

¹Adapted from Roots Resources, a partnership of denominations publishing lectionary-based worship resources since 2002.

<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2004/09-january-february-2004-c/last-after-epiphany-transfiguration/explore-respond/drama-monologue-peters-account-of-the-transfiguration>

on the third day raised to life, and that some of us would see the kingdom of God in our lifetimes.

We didn't understand what he meant: Wasn't the Christ, the Messiah, meant to rule in glory, to overcome those that hated us, to help us throw off the oppressors? How could he die then? Wouldn't that be the ultimate failure? How could he bring in the kingdom of God if he wasn't going to be around for much longer? He probably saw us whispering among ourselves, trying to figure out what it all meant.

Maybe that's why, the following week, he took James and John and me up the mountain to pray. We rose long before dawn, while it was still dark, to make sure that we would be alone and not disturbed. We were all quite tired. Maybe I was a bit sleepy, but I tried to focus my mind in prayer.

I thought at first that I must have drifted off. Again! Why did that keep happening! Why couldn't I keep awake for five minutes? I saw Jesus. I knew it was him, but he looked different: his face a ball of white light, his clothes so dazzlingly white that it hurt my eyes to look at them and I shielded them with my arm (dreams can seem so real sometimes). Then I saw the other figures, two of them, and they were talking to him. It seems strange, but I knew right away who they were: Moses and Elijah. They were all in white too, all three of them enveloped in this amazing light, brighter than the sun. And they were talking with Jesus, like they knew him already, like it was something they did every day. But it was more than that: Jesus was at the center of the three; he was the greatest of them. I thought a lot about that later: imagine it, the Jesus we'd walked with, eaten with, spent so much time with--greater than the greatest of our prophets.

And suddenly I realized I wasn't dreaming, that this was real. It felt like somehow I'd slipped into another world. And I was terrified. Typically for me, I would blurt out anything that came into my head, trying to make the situation seem normal: some nonsense about building shelters for them, James told me afterwards.

Then it got scarier: we were caught up in the cloud, James and John and I. My heart was pounding so hard in my chest I thought it was going to burst and I was quaking all over. If I was going to die, to be struck down because I was unworthy to be in the very presence of God, then I wanted it to happen quickly. And painlessly.

Instead we heard a voice: it seemed all around us, loud and booming, yet it also spoke quietly as a whisper into our ears: 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him.' I fell at Jesus' feet and when I got up, the cloud had gone, and we were alone with him.

He didn't give us any explanation; he just told us not to say anything to the others, to anyone, until he was raised from the dead. We didn't understand what he meant then – it only made sense a long time afterwards.

James, John and I didn't talk about it much among ourselves. I think we were all trying to work out what it meant, but we couldn't quite get there. I only knew that I'd had my confirmation: this man Jesus, my friend and teacher, he was the Christ, the Son of God: he'd come at last! **END**

Questions to Follow the Monologue *Pose these on the worship screen.*

To those who are worshiping online by the livestream with the 11 a.m. service:

This monologue presentation with reflection questions is different from our typical sermon. If you're viewing the service with a friend or family member, you could also take the time to consider the reflection questions.

- In the monologue, Peter expresses how his ideas or perceptions of Jesus have changed. He saw how popular Jesus was with the people and then was confused to hear him talk about suffering and death. How have your views of Jesus changed over time?
- "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" What do you think it means to listen to Jesus or is there a particular way you are trying to do that?
- Mountains have symbolically been places of encounter with God. The Transfiguration took place on a mountaintop. Where is a place or event you have encountered God or felt close to God?