

Transfiguration

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“What’s Next?”

Matthew 17.1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is today’s Gospel, St. Matthew’s telling of the Transfiguration story. Peter, James, and John follow Jesus up a “high mountain.” And there Jesus was “transfigured”. Jesus’ divinity had always been well hidden behind his humanity. When you looked at Jesus he looked and talked and acted like a regular human being. But on that mountain, for just a few moments, Jesus let his divinity shine through his humanity – his face shone like the sun, his clothes became dazzling white. For those few moments Peter, James, and John experienced the glory of God. And heard the testimony of our Heavenly Father: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

All of us have had, will have – may be having right now – one of those days where you wonder, “What in the world is going to happen next????” Get up late because you forgot to set the alarm. Fill the bowl with cereal ... and find someone put an empty milk carton back in the refrigerator. Get in the shower and there’s no hot water. Can’t find the car keys, and when you do, rush out the door to find the car has a flat tire. The wreck on the Beltway has traffic backed up. When you finally get to work the boss tells you the deadline has been moved up a week. Then the school calls – your child’s running a fever and has to go home. What in the world could happen next????

And those are relatively *minor* inconveniences. There are *major* ones. The phone call in the middle of the night jarring you awake with the alarm that a loved one may have been hurt or injured. The catastrophic report from the doctor. The major financial set back.

All of it can leave us world-weary and life-exhausted:

What’s **next**?

What **else** could happen?

What else is going to go **wrong**?

What else do I have **cope with**? **Figure out**? **Fix**?

What’s next?

I think Peter, James, and John would have know what I’m talking about . They had been following Jesus and had become Apostles. But did they realize that day in Galilee 2½, 3 years before – when they dropped everything and left it all to follow Jesus – did they realize then that they were going to become little more than homeless beggars, often sleeping under the stars, living off handouts, wandering from place to place and frequently encountering rejection and hostility. It is quite possible that following Jesus has become a bone-wearying grind.

And now opposition is beginning to heat up. Just about everywhere they go people who don’t particularly like Jesus are showing up to harass him. And lately Jesus has been talking about

martyrdom. Just last week Jesus said he was going to Jerusalem to be killed! When Peter said “We’re not going to let that happen”, Jesus snapped at him! “You devil! You’re getting in my way! Get behind me.”

Wow ... what’s next?????

Well, the next thing Matthew writes is “Six days later ...Jesus was transfigured before them.” or a moment Jesus lets them see the fullness of his glory.

He is saying to them men, I understand it’s become a grind. I understand trading family and fishing for the uncertainties of following me may now seem like a bad deal. And the prospect of martyrdom is *not* all that appealing. But there is a greater reality behind all of this. Here’s a small peek at it. And it’s that greater reality that you serve, and that greater reality that you are working for.

“Listen to him,” God says, “Listen to him. Because what comes next – after Jerusalem and after crucifixion – what comes next is Christ glorified and ruling over all creation. There is nothing broken that will not be fixed. There is nothing that you have given up that will not be restored. There is nothing old that will not become new. This moment of glory is a peek at that future.”

We all have moments of weariness and exhaustion. Times when we ask ourselves what in the world could happen next? As we keep eyes and ears and heart open to God, God provides us moments of transfiguration, moments when we get a peek beyond the day in, day out and can experience the greater reality that lies beyond what eyes can see and hands can touch. Hints that what comes next is not more hardship and pain, but Christ glorified and ruling over all creation.

Wednesday in our schools Chapel service I asked the kids if they ever had a time they were just flat out happy, just tickle-me-Elmo happy. A birthday party with friends and cake and ice cream. The first family trip to Disney World. Scoring the winning basket or learning a new piece of music. Every hand went up.

And just about every hand stayed up when I asked how many of them they’ve had one of those moments of joy had a sense that God was present in that moment, that God was filling that moment. That that moment was a gift from God.

I told the kids that for me one of those moments was witnessing the birth of my granddaughter. My daughter had had a very difficult labor and it was decided she would have to have a C-section. I went into surgery with her and saw my granddaughter be born. The doctor handed her to me. I was the first to hold her.

What a wonderful, joy-filled moment. But in that moment I also had a sense of the presence of God. This precious child was a gift of God. And at that moment it didn’t make any difference that the tires on my car were getting a little thin, or that our capital campaign was a lot of hard work, or that half of you think the sanctuary is kept too hot and half of you think the sanctuary is kept oo cold. There was in that moment just the awareness of this child and God, a greater reality than the normal day to day grind.

We gather in worship for those Transfiguration moments. They come to us in the Word, in a song or prayer, in water and bread & wine. Moments in which – if we open ourselves and give ourselves to them – we see beyond the “now” and experience God’s “what’s next”.

Our liturgy is an opportunity to reach out and touch the divine, to participate in the greater reality that lies behind all we see. As we begin with “confession and absolution”, we go all the way back to Baptism when God washed us clean and claimed us as His eternal possession – in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

As we hear the Word read and proclaimed, we are carried all the way up to Heaven as we we join in that song that is sung perpetually before the throne of grace: **Holy, holy, holy.**

And we participate in the Heavenly Banquet, remembering not only that night when Jesus was betrayed, but rehearsing the heavenly feast yet to come.

In moments of weariness when we ask “What’s next?” I would say remember those moments when God reminds us that there is more than eye can see. A reality behind the daily grind and constant struggle. A greater reality that points to redemption for all our weariness. A greater reality that answers the question “what’s next?”

That beyond our sin is One who forgives.

That beyond our illness is One who heals.

That beyond our hurt is One who restores.

That beyond our weariness is One who refreshes.

That beyond our rejections is One who loves us unconditionally.

That beyond our despair is One who gives us hope.

That beyond our defeats is One who has already won the victory.

That beyond our drifting is One who gives us direction.

That beyond our death is One who is Resurrection and Life.

Friday, we got a letter from a friend of ours. Over the last two years she has had one crisis after another. Her mom was very frail and she cared for her faithfully while working a very difficult job. A close family member died suddenly and not long after that her mom died. She lost some of her vision, making work more of a challenge. Then another family member who she loved deeply died unexpectedly.

In the midst of all of that, she got married. And in her letter writes:

Please accept this long over due thank you note for our wedding gift. In this last year we have experienced so much of what life holds in store. Our loss and pain is as deep as the love that has been our undeserved gift. In the course of our many losses, we have incurred a mounting debt of gratitude to our dear friends, for your unceasing support and caring throughout the loss of our beloved family members. So often there you were on the doorstep (figuratively and literally) with something to comfort, to sustain, to cheer. You have made, and continue to make, Christ known to us.

A Transfiguration moment in the midst of so much pain. And that’s what’s next.