

Transfiguration Sunday-February 19, 2023

Introduction to the day and its themes: Transfiguration Sunday leads us from the season of Epiphany to the season of Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday. Peter, James, and John get a glimpse of Jesus as he would be as the resurrected Christ. The disciples, the first hearers of Matthew's Gospel and we all share something in common. We all need glimpses of Jesus' resurrection to undergird the hope that we too will be resurrected one day.

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

SERMON-

Two graveside services this week provided a fresh look at the story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain. There's no prying apart death and resurrection without cheapening both. The grief stories many among us share show us how death and resurrection intertwine. Time and again

people tell us “you don’t just get over it...you go through it and the rest of life fills in around it.” Resurrection doesn’t make death un-happen—Think ahead to the stories we tell at Easter when the risen Christ appears to his friends, wounds and all.

Then again, as real and permanent as death is, there’s more. Death doesn’t get the last word any more than the Romans or the religious elite rendered a final-final verdict about Jesus or about what he lived for. Resurrection frees us to live meaningful lives for the sake of others and to devote ourselves to love of God and neighbour.

When Peter, James and John see Jesus’ appearance change, they get a glimpse of what Jesus’ resurrected presence looks like. On two recent occasions, Jesus has told them that death approaches...the life he leads inevitably puts him in the crosshairs of both the religious establishment and the empire that claims to have ultimate and lasting control over everyone. Jesus promises resurrection that will overcome death...not prevent it or tame it down in anyway.

Peter, James and John aren’t ready to hear all of that or make sense of it. No wonder Jesus tells people to not say anything for a while! But these three would need that glimpse to make it through the ordeals to come.

Subsequent generations would need glimpses of the resurrection too. Imagine being among the first to hear Matthew’s Gospel told even as the writing was likely still in draft form. Jesus had been executed some 40 years before and the Temple had been completely destroyed and Rome brutally quashed a rebellion. Scattered little communities struggled to relate to a culture that was morphing into something resembling the Roman empire. Those who gathered in synagogue lived the intense internal controversy about whether Jesus was the Messiah.

Such communities would treasure the account of Jesus' transfiguration—a glimpse of the resurrection that gives hope for us too. These communities were also heirs of the traditions of Moses and Elijah. They would remember how God self disclosed on mountain tops while giving the Ten Commandments to Moses...and assuring Elijah in a still small voice when the prophet believed his faithfulness was meaningless and his life worthless. To imagine Jesus communing with a liberator and law giver and with a prophet must have given people assurance that Jesus is the Messiah. Maybe, just maybe when people paid special attention how the Glory of God didn't stay on the mountain but followed Jesus and his followers down the mountain and to the cross. Maybe, just maybe the marginalized people in these little faith communities remembered how the glory of God led people from slavery to freedom by means of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night.

Lent is fast approaching and God's glory leads us in and through. Those who fast will experience a physical hunger that reminds them of their hunger for God and God's realm on earth. Those who pray, might sense glimmers God's glory with resurrection hope. Those who give charitably, might sense how God fashions us to be people who love our neighbour. May the glory of God shine in us; maybe even in the tiniest, mustard seed size ways. Even in the valley and shadow of death, may we be sustained by glimpses of the resurrected Christ. May we sense God's goodness and mercy as it clings to our lives, every day of our lives. Amen.