

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Transfiguration of Our Lord - Year C

104th Sunday of Pandemic - Online Worship Only

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

II Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36[37-43a]

02/27/2022

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

28Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33Just as they were leaving him, Peter said 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"—not knowing what he said. 34While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 36When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

## The Gospel of Our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

### **The Mountain Top**

Good morning! For most of my childhood, every Father's day, my brother and I would load up the car and head over to a Lutheran church where we would wait for a charter bus. The bus would arrive, we would try and get some good seats, and get settled for the 4ish hour ride from Wheeling, WV to Cowen, WV. Deep in the mountains of West Virginia you can find Camp Caesar, which for one week a year became Camp Luther. It's a 4H camp, and so things are a little... rustic... most of the shower heads were at eye level, or lower. Instead of a door on the bathroom stalls we had curtains. The rooms were darkly lit, and the bunk beds I'm fairly certain had been there since the dawn of time. We had no air-conditioning, just fans. The weather was strange. In the evening and early morning you were freezing, the sun was set behind the mountains. But once it was above your head, you were cooked. It's the only place I have ever been in the summer where you needed to pack a jacket AND shorts. Oh, did I mention the humidity? You see, there's a little patch of tropical weather all the way up there, way above the equator, and so you were subjected to even more humidity than you would get here. Dehumidifiers ran 24 hours a day and yet nothing was ever dry. I haven't been to Camp Luther for something like 9 years, and yet I can still smell the horridness that was everything you owned when you got home and unpacked. We called it the "Camp Funk." Because it was so damp, the whole place was full of mosquitos. I once came

home with 68 individual bug bites, I counted! You spent your entire day either walking up a hill, or trying not to roll down one.

By every measurable standard, the place was miserable. And yet... I loved it. Camp Luther was a place that always gave me a mountain top experience. It was a place where God's presence was felt and known. Regardless of how the rest of my year had been, I knew that Camp Luther would be a place of renewal.

The mountain top has always been a place where we humans go to encounter God. This was especially true for the Jews, who could look back and remember stories like our first reading from Exodus. Moses met and talked with God on the mountain, and it would change him. We take it for granted, it's easy to drive to the summit and take a look, but have you ever tried to actually WALK up a mountain?! It's tough work. And at the top? Well that's where the gods live!

So, when Jesus takes some disciples up the mountain, I'm sure they had some high expectations, but I doubt they could have expected anything like what they saw. Saint Ambrose points out that *"Only three, three chosen, were led to the mountain... Peter, who received the keys of the kingdom, John, to whom his mother was entrusted, and James, who was the first to mount a bishop's throne, ascended."*<sup>1</sup> Now, you might be saying to yourself, "Pastor, I get Moses showing up, but what's with Elijah?" Well, together, Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets. Moses brought down the stone tablets and gave to the Israelites the rules that would govern them. Elijah represents the prophet above all others. Even to this day, you will find an empty seat and place setting at every Jewish

---

<sup>1</sup>Just, Arthur A. *Luke. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament III*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003. p. 159.

Passover meal, reserved for him. Moses and Elijah, along with Enoch, are the three characters from Hebrew Scripture who do not die, but instead are taken up into heaven.

All in all, it's a pretty radical experience. But! Like every good story, it doesn't stand alone. On Transfiguration Sunday it can be easy to be caught up in the strangeness and wonder of the tale, but it's not the whole story. You see, the Revised Common Lectionary, the assigned list of scripture readings we follow throughout the three year cycle, doesn't tell us what happens before the Transfiguration. (I mean, I get it, we can't just sit here and read the whole Gospel every week.) But what we missed starts in Luke 9:18. There we read about Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, which Jesus confirms and then goes on to predict his torture, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. DIRECTLY after this, he takes the three up the mountain.

So, just to recap: Peter declares that Jesus is the messiah, the long-sought-after savior who would save all of Israel, which Jesus then confirms! But then he tells them that he will lose, that he will die, and then come back from the dead. He then takes his three most trusted disciples, his three closest friends, and goes up the mountain to talk with dear old Dad. They see Moses and Elijah, Jesus' clothing is transformed into dazzling white garments (a detail we take for granted with our fancy washing machines nowadays), Peter opens his big mouth, God literally speaks from the sky, and in a flash of light Moses and Elijah disappear. That's a lot to take in.

But I get what Peter tries to do. When you experience something that powerful, you want to hold on to it, you want to make it last forever. But, as we said at Camp Luther, you can't stay on top of the mountain forever.

What made that place so special was that it was a retreat from the chaos of life that was all around us. A temporary reprieve, a way to heal and prepare for whatever was coming next. If we stayed, that power would be lost. Eventually a new mountain top would need to be found. But when you descend from those special places, when you look back at the summit, thinking about those wonderful and powerful experiences, you feel your heart strangely warmed. In the rough and tough places of our lives, in our deepest valleys, those memories become the fuel that keeps the fire going, pushing us ever onwards. As Karen Otto said on Monday, “time with God changes you.” And sometimes, that’s just what we need. Amen.