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March 3, 2019

Transfiguration Sunday

Exodus 34:29-35 • Psalm 99 • 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 • Luke 9:28-36

Originally preached at Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, North Chesterfield, Virginia, on February 7, 2016.

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The Jesus I want
is the Jesus of the Transfiguration.

This is Jesus
who goes up the mountain to pray,
peacefully and enlightened,
for me.
Whose face, while praying
changes appearances
and whose clothes become *DAZZLING* with light,
light so brilliant and radiant it blinds me,
wakes me up,
knocks me off my feet.
This Jesus is overwhelmingly powerful.
This Jesus will shine for me on a dark night.
This Jesus has solutions to my problems.

And the Jesus I want
has back-up.
Takes the three “best” disciples
to join him in this glorious prayer-time.
The Jesus I want
has support from the ancient prophets of old,
and can harness the superpowers of Moses and Elijah.
This Jesus does miracles
to save himself and others.

The Jesus I want
will let me box up this power—
he'll let me take it home with me.
Or at least he'll let me build a house where this
radiant, brilliant glory can stay
so I will know where to find it
whenever I want.

The Jesus I want
has a Father
who gives *clear instructions*
and points out precisely where God can be found:
“This is my Son, The Chosen.
Listen to him.”

Radiant.

Brilliant.

Full of Glory.

Powerful.

Clear.

In control.

Surrounded with support.

This is the Jesus I want.

The one
whose birth was heralded by a star,
whose baptism sent an all-powerful Spirit,
whose miracles change water into wine,
revealed today
for me
in glory
on a mountain.

This is the Jesus I want.

I want this Jesus because I am part of a culture
that holds up these values as the best.
The Jesus I *like* to imagine
has the what the world values the most:
Power. Vision. Brilliance.
Solutions. Control. Support.
These are the qualities we find most important in a leader,
or in a god.
We so often want a god who will swoop in and fix our problems.
We want a god who will come clear out our enemies—
real and spiritual ones—
and who will shine so brightly that all dark places in our souls are
illuminated
and we are released, set free, and told—
clearly—
that it's going to be OK.

But there is the Jesus that I want,
And then there is the Jesus
that
I
get.

The Jesus I get
was born in a manger.
The Jesus I get
needs prodding from his mother to perform his miracles.
The Jesus I get
isn't just praying for me on the mountain;
he's praying for my enemies too.

The Jesus I get
/S full of shining glory,
but while he shines,
he talks about his departure,

and by “departure”
he means “death.”
This Jesus
will be abandoned—
no, betrayed—
by his closest friends.
At the end, no one will support him.
He will give up all control,
hand himself over,
get arrested by the authorities.
He will not save himself or others.
He will empty himself of all power
and die.
He will not shine on a mountain
but get placed in a dark tomb tunneled in the earth.

Which Jesus did you come seeking at church today?
Which Jesus were you hoping to meet this Sunday?

If you came to church today seeking the Jesus-we-want,
that Jesus is here today: sovereign, powerful, supreme.
The Jesus of the Transfiguration.
But there is another Jesus here,
who’s also on the mountain at the Transfiguration,
and that Jesus,
the Jesus-we-get,
is harder to find.

See, Jesus is rarely revealed to us
in such an easy, triumphal way:
transfigured on the mountain-top,
where everything is
shiny,
bright,
and clear.

Instead,
the Jesus we find,
the Jesus revealed to us over Epiphany
and over the course of our lives,
is more often
a Jesus who hides.
A Christ who hides God's power
in the chaos of the cross.
A Christ who hides
in a tomb,
dead,
but who rises to new life
on the third day.

The Jesus-we-get
more often
is hidden
in simple gifts
and ordinary items:
in water, bread, and wine;
font, table, and assembly.
The Jesus we get,
hides with us in our suffering,
sits with us in our sin,
to reveal and shine God's grace.

At certain times in life—
uncertain, divisive, we may say dark times—
we desire Christ's preeminence, light, and power.
We want Christ as our prophet, our protector, and alive.
But we can't relish the Transfiguration without remembering the Cross.
We don't get the preeminent power of our prophetic protector
on this mountain
without his visit to another.

For Jesus departs toward Jerusalem,
and the next time we see Christ lifted up on a mountain
it's called Golgotha.

And on Golgotha,
on the cross,
we meet the Jesus-we-get,
the Jesus-most-true,
the God-most-near.
On the mount called Golgotha,
we meet
the Christ who shares our sufferings
and is conformed to our death.
For from that mountain,
from that death,
will come a glory even more brilliant
than this, the Transfiguration's mountain.
From that dark tomb tunneled into the earth
will come the light of all people:
the brilliance of the resurrection.

The Good News today is that
the God we want
is rarely the God we get.
Our almighty, powerful God,
isn't the only one on the mountain shining bright.
The God of the valley of the shadow of death,
the God who takes on death,
guides the blind, forgives sins, offers food,
and hides with us in suffering,
is also there.
God reveals love through the Transfiguration, yes,
and God also reveals the divine love
in the simplest yet most surprising ways:

Bread and water.
Meal and Word.
Spirit and assembly.
Death and life.

These are the things
of Christ's Transfiguration.
They are what reveal Jesus to us today.
And they the things
that transfigure the people of God.

This Sunday
is the last Sunday before Lent begins on Wednesday.
The Season of Lent
begins and ends on two mountains:
on one is the Jesus-we-want,
the Jesus gloriously transfigured.
On the other is the Jesus-we-get,
who refuses to be known through any means
other than the cross.

Which means
that when we leave the mountain of Transfiguration
and head toward the mount called Golgotha,
Christ goes too.
Feeling the pain of our lives with us.
Offering us forgiveness even as we're wandering back.
Getting tossed around with us when life goes out of control.
Preparing a table before we even go hungry.
Offering us bread for the journey.
Loving us, even if we can't love ourselves.
Hidden
in the
mysterious, incomprehensible
way of the cross. AMEN.