



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Transfiguration (A)

#### Followers

[RCL] Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99 or 99:5-9; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Luke 9:28-36

Many a faithful summer church attendee might be surprised to arrive to worship today, supposing that the green vestments and paraments must have gotten stuck at the dry cleaner's, only to realize that the Feast of the Transfiguration, which is fixed on August 6, is one of only a handful of feast days that, when they fall on a Sunday, are given priority. Thus, our readings change slightly, and so do our paraments and vestments.

Luke's Gospel tells us that Jesus summons Peter, James, and John to the mountaintop. And without getting our contextual bearings, we may be tempted to believe that the chosen disciples happily agreed and gleefully followed Jesus without reservation. But if we widen our textual lens just a bit to include all of chapter 9, we hear Jesus tell the disciples in the verses just prior to today's passage that he must undergo great suffering, be rejected, killed, and then rise from the dead.

"If any want to become my followers," Jesus says, "let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it."

And so, as Peter, James, and John journey with Jesus to the mountaintop, they are forced to come to grips with the horrifying truth that Jesus, their beloved friend and leader, must suffer and die! When they reach the top of the mountain, the Gospel tells us that Jesus was transfigured before them and Moses and Elijah appeared. As the disciples beheld their Lord, they realized that they were in the very presence of God!

But even in this incredible moment of divine transfiguration, Peter could not forget what Jesus had told them before they came to the mountain. "Master, it is good for us to be here," Peter petitions, "Let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

At some level, Peter deserves some sympathy. After all, who among us would knowingly submit ourselves or our loved ones to pain and suffering? Peter's efforts to protect Jesus are undoubtedly acts of love and devotion—but they are also acts couched in Peter and the disciples' need for safety and security. "Master, it is good for us to be here..." with the emphasis on "here"—here where it is safe and not down there

where politicians are in cahoots with the professionally religious; here where things are less complicated—where things like love and justice and mercy are unconditional; here where we can keep an eye on things and monitor the goings-on.

The disciples had seen a glimpse of God’s glory in the face of Jesus, and they wanted desperately to hold onto it; to protect it. We can relate to that, can’t we? We’ve had mountaintop experiences with Jesus—a particular church or a particular church service; a place of retreat and refreshment; a treasured conversation partner; or maybe a favorite spot in nature—tender places, where God knits our souls back together again, and we feel refreshed and more whole.

It's only natural that we would want to stay in those places of healing and tenderness and holiness forever, but we can't because although these are the places where we meet Jesus, we are called to follow Jesus—and the thing about Jesus is that he never stays put in any one place very long! That’s why Jesus didn’t say, “In order to be my disciple, you must set down roots and stay put!” No, Jesus says, “If any want to be my disciple, let them take up their cross and follow me.” We must journey into places that we don’t necessarily want to be, amidst people we’d rather not deal with, and into situations that we’d just as soon stay out of.

In some ways, this is the pattern of our worship, too. We come here each week, gathered in community, to meet Jesus in Scripture and Sacrament. But we can’t stay here. Just as the procession leads out of the church at the end of the liturgy, and we are charged to “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,” our work is to follow Jesus out there into the world, wherever he might lead.

In the midst of our ordinary summer Sunday routines, when the schedules are lighter and the days are longer, Transfiguration disrupts us. We are reminded that it’s not enough to meet Jesus in church, or wherever our mountaintops happen to be, we are called to be disciples of Jesus and follow where he leads.

Our call is to take up our cross and follow Jesus. The question is: what’s our answer?

Amen.

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