

Transfiguration of Our Lord-February 19, 2023
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Exodus 24:12-18, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9
We Ourselves Heard This Voice
Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

There are many stories found in the Old Testament that foreshadow events that will happen in the future that are then recorded in the New Testament. The story of Isaac carrying the wood for a fire up a mountain and just at the right moment is prevented from being sacrificed by his father Abraham points to the day of Good Friday in the New Testament when Jesus carries his cross of wood and his Father gives his one and only son to be crucified for us. The story of Daniel who gets dropped into a cave of hungry lions which is sealed with a stone and emerges the next morning untouched by the lions' points to Easter morning when the stone is rolled away from Jesus' tomb and Jesus leaves the tomb where he was for three days. Next week you will hear one of the first stories in the bible when the serpent tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden which points to the New Testament reading that you also will hear next week when Jesus is tempted by Satan in the wilderness. All these OT stories seem obvious that they foreshadow or point to an event in the life of Jesus. As similar as these stories are, they are not the same. Abraham's son Isaac who wasn't sacrificed to test the faith of Abraham is not the same as God's son Jesus who was crucified for your salvation. Daniel was unharmed by the lions. He never died, so there was no resurrection. Jesus on the other hand, suffered and died and after three days rose again. Adam and Eve fell to the temptations from the serpent in the garden when Satan twisted the words that God had just told Adam and Eve, but when Jesus was tempted by Satan to do something to prove he was the Son of God, Jesus never doubted what his Father had just told him when he was baptized when he heard God's voice say to him, "You are my beloved Son with you I am well pleased."

Today's Old Testament and New Testament readings are very similar too. Both Moses and Jesus go up on high mountains. There are references to the time of "six days". There are images of glorious splendor in each event. There are people who witness the radiance of Moses' face when he comes down the mountain and there are witnesses as Jesus' face and clothes become dazzling white while still on the mountain. There are images of people bowed down to the ground in fear. There are clouds spreading uncertainty of what will happen next in each of these stories. For me, what often makes each of these stories come so vividly visual are the details that each of these authors give us so that even if you have very limited artistic talents like me, you can paint a picture in your minds of what these scenes might have looked like if we had been there. If you look these two events side by side, you can see the similarities of these two accounts in the bible and why the story of Moses on the mountain points to the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain.

But if too much of our attention is focused on these details of the glory, wonder and majesty of these similar stories, we are likely going to miss what really matters in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. We can wonder or speculate on Jesus' choice of which disciples that he takes with him up the mountain. Some bible scholars speculate that Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain because they were his favorites. You might say that they were his executive board among his disciples. Peter was named the rock and James and John were called the sons of thunder and from those names you might go along with Jesus choosing them as his favored leaders. If we believe this, Peter, James, and John might be like the delegates that would be selected to attend our annual synod assembly. But even more likely why these three were chosen is the reality that these three disciples were also the most in need of receiving more teaching from Jesus than the other disciples. Peter, the rock, was also told by Jesus to, "get behind me Satan" and the Sons of Thunder, who felt they deserved special places of honor when sitting next to Jesus in his glory might have needed a bit of their arrogance cut down to size.

Another rabbit trail that doesn't lead far is wondering what the conversation was between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Matthew tells us that they were speaking to Jesus. We can assume that since we were not told, it is not necessary for us to know and likely is again the not point of this event. It is also apparent that

Peter's efforts to build three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah doesn't seem to be the point of the story since Jesus so quickly shuts down Peter's unsolicited efforts to protect Moses, Elijah, and Jesus from the unfavorable elements on the high mountain. The youth from the Northern Rim Youth Group that hiked up Flathead Mountain last summer would have welcomed someone like Peter who would have built some protective shelters from the cold rains that fell on them and keep the mountain goats away from interrupting their sleep while they were on the high mountain.

So, what should our focus be and where should our attention be drawn to in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus if it isn't it can't be found in the image that we now have in our mind. Peter recalls and delivers what he felt was most important that day. In our second reading for today he doesn't review all that he saw that day with his eyes. Peter remembers what he heard that day with his ears. Peter said, "We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with Jesus on the holy mountain." Peter remembered the voice that he heard say to Jesus, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased." And to these three disciples he heard this voice say to them, "Listen to him."

Last Monday night after our community Easter Cantata practice, a choir member came up to me who also remembered a mountain top experience. But what she specifically recalled was the voice. She asked me, "Wasn't there a Pastor Steve Paulson who was here and preached recently?" She said that she was at a funeral the previous week and she recognized his voice because she remembered how it filled the room and commanded the attention of all those who were listening. I agreed that Dr. Paulson was here, and he does have a voice that is unforgettable, but I said I didn't think that it was all that recent that he was here.

I went back through our recorded videos and snapped this picture of Dr. Paulson preaching here. Once again, there are details in this picture that give us a clue of what else was going on that day. This service was a bit of a mountaintop worship experience for me too. Since the paraments were all red that day and others in the picture are wearing red, you have two likely choices of what was going on that day. Either it was Pentecost Sunday or Reformation Sunday. Ellen Aadland and Marge Hegge were both here and used their wonderful musical talents to enhance the worship that day. During this worship, I showed some of the pictures that Marge had given me from her trip where she and Ellen were on where they traced the footsteps of Martin Luther. From all these details, you can be certain it was Reformation Sunday. But it wasn't from Reformation Day in 2022. It was in 2021. But for this choir member, it seemed like yesterday that she remembered hearing that voice. If only my sermons had such lasting impressions.

This singer remembered from that great day of worship what Peter remembered from his mountaintop experience with Jesus. The voice. Not just any voice, but a voice that clearly distinguishes between the words that Moses might have said about telling what you should and should not do and the words that Jesus says by telling you what he has done for you. And in the end of the Transfiguration story there is no more Moses or Elijah. We are left with only Jesus. We are left with only what matters most. Jesus. Jesus, alone. Jesus whose voice we know as our good shepherd who calls his sheep by name, and they know his voice and the good shepherd who knows each of his sheep. Even though it may have been decades ago when a voice spoke to you and said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", you know that voice as if you just heard it yesterday. In fact, you just heard it again today as you listened to it just as Peter, James and John were instructed to do when they heard the voice from the cloud tell them to "Listen to Jesus." You can say today as Peter said when several years later, he recalled the transfiguration of Jesus, "**We ourselves have heard This Voice**" as if it were yesterday as he once again claims you as his beloved children. Amen.