

Sermon Text for March 2, 2025

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Exodus 34:29-35 and Luke 9:28-36 *“The transfiguration according to Luke”*

We begin a different journey together today in our faith walk with our Savior. We have changed the colors out, from green to white and then on Wednesday they will go to purple. The white today normally we associate with resurrection, which is close, but transfiguration Sunday, which is the Scripture that we will be reading shortly in Luke together, is a Sunday that gets its own white color, even though it is not the resurrection, or the birth. Christmas is also white. So why do we have white for the transfiguration?

Normally in our faith journey together we want to present to others a more palatable description of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and jump right to the Easter and the Christmas and all those massive moments of celebration in our church life that are much more consumer friendly, but this is not the case for the transfiguration. Today Jesus tells us we must die before we can receive the full glory that is promised to us in our relationship with Jesus. We hear today that the road that we take as disciples is filled with suffering and death and while this doesn't sell, it is the truth, a truth that we would often want to avoid and just jump right to the resurrection like we do in our final hymn together.

As far as a church is concerned this may not strike you as anything new. I sent out an enews and described this season in which we find ourselves, a season of mourning as we have had to say goodbye to seven people in less than two months. That leaves a mark that is indelible and does not go away easily. The challenge may be for some of us to find the glory of the Lord in this moment of our journey together. It is our duty to claim to the promises of Scripture even as we come off our mountain top experiences and may find ourselves alone, still God promises and His promises we know are faithful and true, even if we are walking in the midst of a cloud. Let's read.

READ

So Moses and the Israelites had a really interesting experience and it parallels very closely to the experience that Jesus and his disciples have thousands of years later. Moses is up on Mount Sinai and he is in conversation with God, face to face with God, and as a result of experiencing the presence of God he changes. No, I mean he physically changes, his face becomes glowing, it radiates the presence of God every time that he speaks with God. It isn't

just this one time, but over and over again it radiates so much that it was terrifying to Aaron and to Israelites so he had to cover himself up.

I preached a sermon some years back on this passage and entitled it shiny happy people, and how our experiences with God ought to change us so much that people should be able to see how we are changed when we interact with them. It shouldn't terrify them, but the fact that we are disciples of Jesus Christ ought to change us in such a way that it is visible to others. That is a truth in Scripture and in our daily lives, that encounters with God ought to change us, but that isn't the point that we are making today.

We see consistently that people of God who encounter God are almost always driven to fear. I can understand why because encounters with God that leave us changed for life are few and far between. We don't see the face of God on a daily basis, we don't see Jesus transformed and glowing on a regular diet. When was the last time that we can say that the Lord is in this place in a way that is indisputable and without doubt? I believe he is, but these events in Scripture aren't meant just to be metaphors from which we derive a lesson and then move on to the next teaching. These events really happened and I guess if something like this would happen in your own life, it would leave you a bit afraid.

The closest thing we came to having our appearances changed when we interacted with God was a few months ago when our Clerk of Session baptized the choir members around him with grape juice during communion, but that didn't last, and I probably promised that I wouldn't say anything to anyone.

Jesus and his disciples have a mountaintop experience in our Scripture today. As I said earlier it is not meant to be a metaphor but a real life experience that was to change the disciples forever. We call today the transfiguration because we see that Jesus' appearance changes. The word trans, means change, and figure, means appearance, so Jesus' appearance changes. It changes and become dazzling white. Now, with Moses when he encounters God his face glows because of the impact of this external force of God upon him, but with Jesus his change is not as a result of an external force, but it emanates from him, this force and presence of God was Jesus himself.

We read that two people appeared with him. This phrase: suddenly they saw two men is repeated word for word in Luke at Jesus' resurrection at the empty tomb when the women see them by the open grave, and then again word for word in the ascension in Luke where the disciples are staring up into the clouds when Jesus has ascended into heaven. They are defined

as Moses and Elijah. I know I am throwing a lot at you right now, but remember who these two are, at the end of this sermon we will see why they are Moses and Elijah.

One aspect that is crucial to the transfiguration that I can't believe I just picked upon this week, and maybe because of this season in which we find ourselves as a church, is that we actually know what the conversation between Jesus and Moses and Elijah is all about. I never noticed that before. What are these three men talking about in the glory of God? It tells us in verse 31 that they were speaking about Jesus' departure. Who wants to guess what Greek word is used for departure, I'll give you a hint, it is a book of the Bible in the Old Testament. I'll give you another hint, it the book of the Bible that we read from already this morning in the Old Testament. They were speaking about the exodus of Jesus.

This is crucial, because the verses before these in Luke Jesus just had a heart to heart with his disciples that part of the plan for him was that he was going to have to suffer and die, but this was part of the plan that God had in store for him. This suffering and dying, was his exodus. He told his disciples that they too would have to take up their crosses. But they were like we are, we would rather stay in white and not linger in the purple, where we find the suffering and the death. We are more comfortable with the birth and the resurrection.

Jesus tells his disciples that the very painful experiences that are a part of being a follower of Jesus do not lie across the way, where maybe you only have to cross over them once, but they are on the way, even an integral part of the way. On this mountain, the subject of conversation is death. Jesus' death, his departure. But even this is part and parcel of the Good News which will be proclaimed by the disciples as they faced their own suffering and stared at death in the face. It isn't foreign to our faith, it is part of the fabric of our faith.

Jesus in his transfiguration tell us that we must die before we can achieve the glory that God has intended for us. There is no shortcut from green to white, you have to pass through the purple. Peter ignores this completely, this hard lesson, and tries to come up with a solution to make his mountaintop experience, his personal relationship with Jesus, more palatable, more user friendly, something we could give to visitors, like mugs, when they visit. You don't want to give them a note card that says if you stay here then suffering and death will be a part of your faith journey. I mean, it is true for all disciples, but why draw attention to it? He wants to just linger with Jesus and Elijah and Moses for a little longer.

He says something incoherent and God takes over again, in a cloud he envelops all of them, including the disciples, and tells his disciples to listen to Jesus, the chosen one, the one

chosen for salvation, but also the one chosen to suffer and die. The clouds disappear, and they are left alone with Jesus, in a post-mountaintop reality. The mountaintop experience has passed, and what remains now for us is the way of the cross. It is a hard message, but it is one that is true.

As we make our way down the mountain it would be helpful for us to hear the words of Malachi 4 who tells us what it will be like in the final days before Jesus comes back. He states: Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents. Our faith journey is about the change that God brings about in our lives as a result of the relationship that we have with him. But that relationship puts us on a path that is the way of cross, it contains suffering and death. But only in death are we able to experience the fullness of God's glory. May God make us ready for his coming, by turning our hearts toward him. Amen.