

## **“How Do You Follow That?” based on Mark 9:2-9, 2 Kings 2:1-12**

**Delivered by Pastor Drew Mangione on February 11, 2024, at Shelby Presbyterian Church**

Every year I get a little excited about this Sunday. There's a lot riding at the end of any season, right? At moments like this you want everything to fall into place for a great storyline so it all makes sense. Some of you out there, like me, might really treasure the meaning of this Sunday. Others of you may not understand the commotion and what makes it different from any other Sunday. Yet, we are all here gathered on this Transfiguration Sunday.

I probably didn't sell it well enough but I was hoping some of you might have thought I was about to talk about the Super Bowl. Now, you're wondering though – Does he really get excited about Transfiguration Sunday? You might think, “I get it. He's a pastor. But that might be a bit much even for a pastor.”

The truth is I do get excited, not in the rah-rah Super Bowl sense, but because this is one of those interesting moments when the disciples get a preview of what's to come. They get a glimpse of Jesus in all of his glory for one special moment. They see eternity in front of them because they see Moses long dead and Elijah who was taken up by the chariot. Then they see Jesus as they have never seen him before. A cloud comes over them and speaks, “This my Son, the beloved. Listen to him.” And then it's gone. All gone.

I think what I appreciate about this Sunday and this story is that it is like our lives. We get those little glimpses of transformation and change, but sometimes we don't recognize them. In other times we try to memorialize them. In still other times, we think we have to build something. The truth is that in our lives we can miss the transfigurations that happen. This word means a change in body, and in Greek, the word is “*metamorpho*” which is a profound change.

One of the things we have a tendency to do in our culture is to take photographs of things. We want to preserve whatever we are experiencing rather than being in the moment. We pull out our phones and make sure we have a permanent copy of it. That's what Peter is doing here. He wants to set up tents to make something permanent or prolonged out of this incredible moment. We also have a tendency in our culture to see something great and resolve then and there that we need to build on this – what can we do more? That again, is what we see from Peter.

When something good is happening, we often will compare ourselves to our past performance or we will think about what this will do for us in the future. In doing this, we miss the transfiguration moment as it is happening. What if we took a moment when we see something remarkable – a spark of change or growth in our child, some moment where a scripture suddenly makes sense to us, or a place we see God at work in the world – and we tuned our eyes to those things. What if this is what we looked at, rather than automatically thinking, “What do I have to do? What do I have to do to preserve or capitalize on this?”

Peter, Andrew, James, and John each have a truly remarkable encounter in this moment. When we read a story like this it is easy for us to imagine that they had great faith because they were there and saw Jesus. They saw this moment. Clearly that's why they believed. It's much harder for us today. Yet, the thing about it is that they struggled too even immediately after, when they are arguing with themselves, asking, “What does it mean for someone to rise from the dead?”

Just before this, Jesus had told them they he would be arrested, tried, killed, and that he would rise again. Now they've seen Moses and Elijah somehow raised from the dead. Now, they're walking away saying, "Yeah, it's got to mean something else."

It reminds me of the scene from Monty Python's *Life of Brian* in the scene of the Sermon on the Mount when people in the back, far from Jesus, who they can barely hear, and they think he has said, "Blessed are the cheesemakers." And immediately, someone rationalizes that, "Well, obviously this is not meant to be taken literally. It refers to any manufacturers of dairy products." As in that movie, the disciples in our reading are immediately trying to explain it away.

This is one of those texts where we have to resist the temptation to over explain and realize that in our lives there are things we cannot explain. There are things that happen that are wonderful, like when we see someone changed, or when we see someone who acts outside of what you expect to make something beautiful.

There is a Christmas story of a woman who is very upset about her drinking and swearing husband. It's Christmas Eve and he refuses to come to church. While she's there, a storm rolls in, and it is causing damage to some homes with bad roofs. The husband goes out swearing and yelling and upset in the storm, but he climbs up on the roof and saves home after home fixing the holes. The wife goes to her pastor complaining that her husband is awful for drinking, swearing, and not going to church on Christmas Eve.

The pastor responded, "Did you not see how he was Christ last night?" She responded, "How he was swearing and drinking instead of being in church?" The pastor said, "No, when he was serving and helping those who could not help themselves. To them, he was Christ in our flesh that night." There's a moment of transfiguration that she missed, thinking that it looked like something else. She wasn't looking for Christ. She was looking for something to condemn, rather than salvation.

The Transfiguration happens every day. Jesus is revealed every day in and among the people this world. He is revealed in and among each other. This is the good news: God is with us. God came down and shared in our humanity, lived as we live, and died for us, and rose again for us. This was not because God had to do this, but because God loves us. By this good news, we are empowered to be temples of the Holy Spirit to share that love in the world around us.

This idea of God being with us empowers us not only to "do" things, but also to see things, recognize God at work, and reflect on these transfigurations in our midst. We are empowered also to rest in that glorious truth that no matter what we think should be happening, God is at work. No matter how worried we are about the future, someone will always be there like Elisha taking over for Elijah to pick up the mantle and bear witness.

God's promise is that the gates of hell will never prevail against the church and so, even though things change, God's promise is always to be with us. God is with us now and will be with us to the end when all is complete in the new creation.

We have a wonderful moment in our church where we have seen growth, energy and enthusiasm in so many places. In this, I fully admit I am Peter saying, "Ok, Lord, what do we have to do to capitalize on this, memorialize this, and build on this?" It's like God has been slapping me on the head recently. I've picked out a series of books that I did not expect to all share this concept, but

there it was. These texts have been a reminder that sometimes we do need to just look with eyes to see God at work. Then when we recognize that something wonderful is happening, we can enjoy it for what it is and wait for what God brings next.

That is the lesson of the Transfiguration. It is the preview of the Resurrection. We are about to get on the road of Lent and walk 40 days with Christ to the cross where the world will do its worst to him and then will come the Resurrection where he shows he has conquered all. Amen.