

It is Transfiguration Sunday, where we celebrate Christ in all his glory. We put the white hangings out and use the word Alleluia. It is a time of celebration in honor of Christ's divinity. This Sunday prepares us to be strong for the challenging times of our faith. For many, the season of Lent is one such challenging time. It is a period of reflection. Of repentance.

The seasons of repentance are hard because we have to look at ways in which we can see Jesus more clearly. We see this in what we give up: some people abstain from chocolate, or ice cream, or alcohol, or fast for several days. Others take on a task such as volunteering; an act of service. Everything we do is supposed to be a way to deepen our faith.

On this transfiguration Sunday, we are given a glimpse of Jesus' future resurrection. A time to celebrate Christ's divinity.¹ This is meant to fortify our hearts as we fast during the season of Lent. It is meant to give us strength for the crosses we bear in preparing our hearts for Easter. Today, we feast on these words in our hearts.

Next Sunday, we begin a time of fasting.

To understand what is happening, it is important to put this scripture in context. Directly before this passage in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah. Peter is doing well. Jesus had explained what it took to be a disciple, and the followers were traveling to Jerusalem. Their experience was one of ups and downs, and they could not see the same reality that Jesus saw.² I imagine each of them felt a bit nervous about all that was ahead of them, however, also, fortified by the fact that they were beginning to recognize in their hearts who they were following: the anointed one, the savior, the blessed Messiah.³

Also, the task ahead of them felt daunting: how could they truly live up to these expectations that Jesus had laid before them? I imagine these disciples, these intimates of Jesus felt excited and unnerved.

Then, came the final confirmation they were all waiting for, and it is important to set the scene. It was late at night. On a mountain. A physically high location, where three: an intimate crew gathered together. They were tired, fighting sleep, when suddenly, Jesus' identity became all the more apparent, "And while Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white."⁴

Remember, Peter is tired. Perhaps this is a foreshadowing to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Peter slept while Jesus prayed for the cup to pass. Peter is fending off sleep. And like many of us, in his tiredness, he comes to the wrong conclusion: he suggests making an earthly tabernacle.

Oh Peter, he does not recognize that the clouds created the dwellings for these prophets.

Peter does not realize how to treat Jesus as the holy embodiment of God. In some ways, he is missing the point of the transfiguration.

Peter is on the mountaintop and wants to remain on the high forever.

Rather, the gift of the moment is that the experience can provide strength for the future challenges of ministry. For the future challenges of the way leading to the cross.

¹ Brandt Hale Lori (2009). *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word.* Louisville: Westminster. Luke 21:25-36. pp.452-456

² Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke.* Nottingham: Apollos.

³ Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

⁴ Luke 9:29

How we celebrate/respond to Mountain Top experience today can lend us strength for our own journeys and ministries ahead of us.

The truth of the matter is that we must come down from the mountaintop experience. Each Sunday, at the Eucharist we remember the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. We remember our redemption. However, it is not possible to embody Christ's mission by remaining within these beautiful walls.

They are meant to fortify us, and we certainly experience mountain tops within our worship. Baptisms, celebrations of new ministry, ordinations, confirmations, marriages, and blessings of our building are all gifts from God. They are all mountain top experiences.

It is not possible to make earthly dwelling here forever. We must leave those experiences and return to the world in order for ministry to be done.

Places such as the Hope Center, altar guild, choirs, and our children's ministry, invite they all need our support in our regular worship lives. We must take our joyful hearts into these ministries. Our text today provides us an example of what happens when we do not learn the lesson of the mountaintop.

Jesus healed the boy who had an unclean spirit.⁵

Luke places the importances on the spiritual healing that is needed for this son, this only child.

The disciples are not absent from this vignette. These men, who had just witnessed the glory of God through Jesus Christ's transfiguration could not heal the precious son because of their lack of faith. Despite all they had seen and all the affirmation, despite witnessing the transfiguration, that they received they could not heal him. Jesus, rightfully rebukes them.⁶ It is easy, 2,000 plus years later to agree with Jesus, however, if I examine my own heart I see times when my faith has failed me, when I too have fallen short of the task because I lacked faith.

Perhaps, there are similar times in your own life when you have fallen short.⁷

The truth of the matter, my friends, is that we need this entire reading to sustain our hearts through Lent. We need to remember Christ's transcendent Glory in times of pain. We need it to sustain us when we look at what needs to be changed in the forty days of reflection. We must remember that those closest to Jesus also fell short, and they witnessed incredible glory.

It is imperative at this time to prepare our hearts to take up our cross, as N.T. Wright notes, "We, too, often find it completely bewildering to know how to understand all that God is doing and saying, both in our times of great joy and our times of great sadness."⁸

⁵ Note that this unclean spirit was not described as epilepsy. Epilepsy was common in the ancient near east, yet Luke, the physician, emphasizes that this boy has an unclean spirit. Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

⁶ Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

⁷ Read an example, There was once a man who had great faith. He was prosperous, though not overly rich. He was in the Navy and nearly died at sea. Miraculously, he survived, however, he continued in many of his sinful paths - including upholding slavery. Eventually he became an Anglican priest. After decades of ordained ministry, he finally renounced slavery. Writing a famous hymn - Amazing Grace. John Newton had experienced glory and like those disciples, he had fallen short. Like many of us, similar to the disciples, he took time to have his faith and actions align. Newton here:
<https://www.biography.com/news/amazing-grace-story-john-newton#:~:text=The%20song%20was%20written%20by%20a%20former%20enslaver&text=Newton%20was%20born%20in%201725,impressed%20into%20the%20British%20navy.>

⁸ Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

We can respond to Christ's divinity today, taking in the glory around us. Note the joyful music. Look with wonder at the cross, not shrouded. Prepare for the pancake supper, and enjoy each deliciously savory bite. We can celebrate with joy. Let this joy sit in our hearts and be reminded of it when we enter a season of reflection over the next six weeks. Allow this time of joy to fortify you and inform your daily actions. Amen.