

First Lesson: Exodus 24:12-18
Second Lesson: 2 Peter 1:16-21
The Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9

Transfiguration of our Lord
February 23, 2020

“Activation – Come Down from the Mountain”
Sermon Preached by Pastor Judith Rainforth
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

The beginning of epiphany was about the baptism of Jesus. We celebrated that this morning, we are reminded of our own baptism. Today we celebrate transfiguration. Jesus used the same words, the same words God gave that day, are used today. The words, “This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!” Listen to him is what was added, at baptism, at Jesus’ baptism. It wasn’t there but God said this now, “Listen to him!” There was an exclamation mark at the end of that, so it is very important as we talk about becoming activated, that we think about that today. I am going to show you a little clip, I was introduced to this Wednesday Night Alive. Debbie Nelson is showing a series on Matthew, it’s acted out and narrated in a beautiful way, so I took liberty to bring to you today the clip on the transfiguration.

After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them, his face shown like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then, there appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be, if you wish I would put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen until the son of man has been raised from the dead.”

Listen to him! How do we become activated by these words and come down from the mountain and take this revelation into our everyday life? We cannot stay on the

top of the mountain forever. The three disciples, Peter, James and John, heard these words. What do you suppose they thought when Jesus was transfigured before them? What would you think? His face and clothes became dazzling white, and then Moses and Elijah talking with him. They had been dead a long time. The disciples were so amazed and ecstatic that they wanted to build dwellings for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. We might find that ridiculous, but they were just trying to help. How often have we tried to help in a ridiculous way? I know I have. But then a bright cloud appears, and an affirmative voice, “This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Now, those three disciples were filled with fear, but Jesus comforts them. Jesus is the one who can truly comfort us in the same way.

When have we been afraid and we felt that comfort from Jesus? Jesus told them to keep the secret until he was raised from the dead, but we haven’t been asked to keep that secret. Hallelujah! We can share that good news, and how do we get involved in that, and in making a difference in the world for the sake of Jesus Christ, and those in front of us? All you have to do is read your bulletin today, the back of it, and see all the things that I didn’t even have time to tell you about. I know that this church, this church that is so beautiful, American Lutheran Church is activated. They are activated to serve the poor, to serve the homeless, to serve the immigrant that has been torn apart in their family, to get involved in the Bible studies and the prayer groups. The list goes on of how we are activated here. We can make a choice to get out of our comfort zone and get involved in those things, and allow the transfiguration to transform each one of us. Seems to me that when Pastor Lowell stood before us and said “Are the best days behind us, or are they ahead of us?” I sat back here in my chair and I just wanted to stand up and shout “They are ahead of us!” You have had great days behind you, but the best days, the best years are yet to come because God is continuing to call each one of us to be pioneers, not settlers. Settlers, they get kind of comfortable and they don’t really want to get out of the safety of their walls, and they get a little fearful anytime somebody even speaks about a little change. We don’t want to be that way. We want to be pioneers, we need to take our Christian experience to places that uproot us. Life is a journey to be lived, it’s not a destination.

What touches you deeply? How will you respond to that? I was laughing when I was thinking about this, this is the last place I thought I would find myself. I was pretty settled where I was, but God had different plans for me and I am so excited about it. Someone said to Mother Theresa, she is one of my heroes, “Do you think

you are going to eliminate poverty by what you are doing? You are almost 90 years old, you have pneumonia, traveling across the world, you are going to kill yourself, wear yourself out trying to help the homeless poor.” And she quietly said, “I wasn’t called to be successful, but faithful. Each one of us has something beautiful to do for God.” Those were her words, she was a pioneer. I want to grow up and be like her. We not only listen here, but we take what we hear and see out into the world.

The Gospel is shared in so many ways, our beautiful musicians, Glen was here before, he is here today. It is just amazing to me how that Gospel is proclaimed in the music. How we greet each other, and when somebody comes through those doors and you don’t recognize them, go introduce yourself to them. Or in a restaurant, smile at people, open the door for people. We are in a time in our society that has never been more divided. I am saddened by the division, not only outside of my family, inside my family, inside our churches. What can we do? We can smile, we can be more helpful, we can be friendly. We don’t have to be cantankerous when we don’t agree. Let us all be transfigured by this valley that we are in.

We need community just as much as the community needs us, and just as much as that community on top of that mountain, Jesus didn’t go alone, he took the disciples with him. People say, “I don’t need to come to church, I have other things to do on Sunday morning. I love to be out in nature and that is how I worship God and I commune with God there.” I say, “I understand that, but it’s not community, we need community to grow spiritually. We find strength in numbers.” I don’t know about you, but if I didn’t come to worship on a regular basis, left to my own devices, I could be a loose cannon, or a lost, lost sheep. I need you, I need you when I feel strong, and I need you when I feel weak. We need one another. All that we have accomplished over the years, could not have happened if we had stayed on top of the mountain, or if we had stayed in isolation. You would have missed all the wisdom gained from the ups and downs of life. I have learned over the years to live without regrets. All the joys and sorrows that have been in my life have brought me here today, and I thank God for each and every one of them. I pray that whatever you are going through or have gone through has seasoned you like salt seasons food, and that you can be activated to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

Recently, Ann Jones, Judie Stage and I went to the Navajo Nation. I was not here last week, we went on a Wednesday, came back last Sunday night. Thus I helped the economy. I have some brushed buffalo earrings on today. I decided it was for a

good cause. The Navajo Nation is such a beautiful place to be, it is up by Four Corners. We didn't go to tell them how to live, we learned how they live in peace and serenity. We have a Lutheran mission up there that is incredible, and I hope it becomes an annual trip for us, that more of us can go every year so that we can find out how to be helpful, to be in the partnership, but also how to be helped by their way of living out the Gospel. Not all are Christians up there, but it seems to me that everyone that the Lutheran mission has touched has been transfigured. Thanks to people like us. We started being involved at a higher level when we had the walk for water. We raised over \$50,000 so they could have fresh water, so they don't have to have contaminated water. They don't have to buy their water from the city anymore at a high expense. Let's keep being activated, not only to help the Navajo Nation, but other people out in the world.

As we begin our Lenten journey, which seems like I can't believe it is already. Can you believe Ash Wednesday is this Wednesday? Come. As we come together in peace, knowing all will be well because God has promised, he has sent his son for each of us, the beloved in whom God is well pleased. Listen to him! We don't have to wait for Easter, we know the rest of the story. We can live our resurrection faith, today and in the days to come. No matter what age we are, we can use this day, inspired by the Holy Spirit to live for Jesus. We don't have to wait, it begins now. We do it one day at a time and I pray that we will do this until we take our last breath on this earth. That we can live with a grateful heart because of transfiguration, and our baptismal journey. Amen