

A Meditation for Feb 19/23, ‘Transfiguration Sunday’ – pg. 1

By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church

Hello and welcome! Over the weeks since we began this season in the Christian calendar, we’ve (more or less!) been reading our way sequentially through parts of chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 of Matthew’s gospel. Today, however, the lectionary has us climb up all the way to chapter 17, and its Transfiguration story, in order to summarize, and reflect upon, what we’ve been doing. And all of that while we go mountain-climbing with Jesus! Well, let’s begin by turning to God in prayer:

Eternal God: help us to climb the mountain with Jesus now!

Help us to understand your vision

that our hearts and minds may become transfigured in your love.

In Jesus’ name this we humbly ask, amen.

Today’s gospel lection: Matthew 17:1-9 ‘Jesus is transfigured on the mountain’ (NRSV)

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James, and his brother John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And Jesus was transfigured before them – his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Sermon: ‘Mountain-Climbing with Jesus’

Loving God, like the disciples before us, we’re often perplexed before the mystery of who you are, and what you do – the sheer wonder of how your love works. So, illuminate your nature for us now! Then illuminate your love in how we live this week. Amen!

Today, quite the challenge AND opportunity are in store for us. Today, we have a chance to go mountain-climbing with Jesus. Now, don’t worry, we don’t need any special equipment, or any particular levels of physical fitness. Let’s remember that spirituality is never a race, and that the view from the top of the mountain is just as glorious, no matter how long we take to get there! But, although what I’m proposing doesn’t require physical muscle, what we’re going to do today does require spiritual muscle. So, I want to think with you about three habits that we need to develop, and practice every day, if we’re ever

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going to develop the kind of spiritual muscle that we'll need to go mountain-climbing with Jesus.

First of all, we have to learn to live as people who are, not just responsible, but 'response-able' – that is to say, able to respond in the way we want, regardless of the circumstances that come our way. You see, we don't have to be a matter of the things that happen to us. Nor do we have to be controlled by the feelings that we experience. And we're certainly never a matter of what others think about us. Rather, we all are able to choose our own responses and, therefore, we have response-ability! So, because we're not dependent on circumstance, the only thing that really limits us is our own imagination. As Napoleon Hill once famously said, 'If our minds can conceive and our hearts can believe, then our hands can achieve.' Look I know that life sure can be hairy, but choosing our responses, and being proactive, well, that's the only way to manage in life, because it's the only way to avoid feeling managed by life. 'Response-ability' turns our own little island-worlds of ego into interconnected tapestries of value and hope.

Secondly, we have to learn to live a life that based on a win/win orientation. That's where we only win when we help others to win. I once heard of a person who bought a very profitable business. This company had been the very first into the market with a radically new and efficient computer software. Oh, my, was this company ever in a golden situation – it was as though it had a license to print money! But the new owner started to change a lot of things, changes that were based upon competition among the employees, not cooperation. Then, despite its momentous head-start, this company become unprofitable, and eventually went into bankruptcy. Jesus once said, "The first shall be last and the last first." Well, in that light, it's a simple spiritual reality that we grow the most, we grow the best, when we help others first to grow.

So, we have to be 'response-able.' We also have to develop a win/win orientation. Finally (at least for today!), we have to learn how to turn our journeys into destinations. In a fabulous book by Steven Covey entitled, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, there's a great story about a man who was working incredibly hard cutting wood in a forest. Well, along came another man who stopped to watch the process for a few moments, and then made the comment, "Excuse me, Sir, but I'm a professional lumberjack and, it's obvious to me, the saw that you're using is very, very dull. Why don't you take a break for a few moments, and sharpen it?" "Oh, no," the other man replied, "I'm much too busy for that!" Well, how much time and energy do you and I waste by trying to do things with dull, rusty tools? In this sense, tools are the attitudes that we hold, the values that we nurture, and the behaviours with which we choose to live. On the other hand, when we constantly sharpen the saw of our living, well, that's when the entire nature of our journeys in life will change, because that's when our journeys become their very own destinations. Now this is NOT about doing the same old things over and over and over like a hamster on a treadmill, going around and around and around, but never getting anywhere. Oh, no! You see, when our journeys become their own destinations, that's when the very repetition of doing the

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right things at the right times becomes an upward spiral as we learn, and grow, and come to experience at a higher level. The story of Jesus' life is the story of how God would help us sharpen all of our attitude-tools. The story of Jesus' life is the story of how God would thereby help us to turn all of our spiritual journeys into their very own destinations!

Jesus stands transfigured with us this morning – do you see him? Would you like to climb mountains with Jesus and be transfigured too? Would you like to know a whole new sense of peace, and joy, and meaning? Well, come to God's banquet of love this morning. Come and receive communion, meeting with God-in-Jesus' teaching all over again. Turn your journeys into destinations, and live in an upward spiral with a view that's breathtaking!

On this Transfiguration Sunday, as is our minister's custom, let us climb into God's love through the sacrament of communion! Go and get something to eat, something to drink, and let's start!

Minister: Lift up your hearts –

People: **we lift them up to God!**

Minister: Give thanks to God –

People: **it is right to give our thanks and praise!**

Loving God, we lift up our hearts to you, for blessed are you, creator of light and source of love! You would raise us up as on eagles' wings and set us among all your creatures in a covenant of love and service. So it is that we join the song of all creation to proclaim your goodness, O holy, holy, holy God:

Sanctus and Benedictus

O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space.

All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace.

Hosanna in the highest heav'n, Creation sings your praise.

And blessed is the One who comes and bears your name always! [MV203]

Today, O God, we remember the last time Jesus ate with his disciples, we remember how he took a loaf of bread and gave it to them, saying: "Take, eat; this is my body, given for you. Each time you do this, remember me."

We remember how Jesus also took a cup, and after giving thanks to God for providing that, he passed it to his friends, saying: "Take, drink; this is a cup of grace poured out for you. Whenever you drink it, remember me."

At this time, we also remember all with whom you would have us share your feast. We pray for [*intercessions of the day*] and ask that, in the silence to come, you touch all the concerns that we carry with us this day ... [*time of silence*].

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Loving God, we rejoice in the gift of your grace! Grant that, in praise and thanksgiving, we may so offer ourselves to you that our very lives may proclaim the mystery of faith – Sing Christ has died!

Memorial Acclamation

Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen,

Christ will come again!

Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen,

Christ will come again! [MV204]

Send, O God, your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts, that all who share in them may become your love, for, and in, the world!

The Bread of Life – eat and hunger no more!

The Cup of Grace – drink and thirst no more!

Thank you so much, O Holy God, for meeting with us – amen, amen, hosanna and amen:

'The Great Amen'

Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and Amen!

Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and Amen! [MV205]

Having climbed the mountaintop with Jesus this morning, may *that* view inform, and transform, all that happens to us this week! In the name of God our creator, God our redeemer, and God our companion, amen.