

At Home Worship
February 14, 2021
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God's creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

Let us come together, all who would call upon the name of the Lord!

Our lives are touched as we gather together and worship the Lord.

God is our strength and our help as we face the strains of living.

In all of the battles life brings, the final victory belongs to God.

Then let us lift our hearts in praise and song to Almighty God!

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

Almighty and merciful God, whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death upon the cross: Give us faith to perceive his glory, that being strengthened by his grace we may be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "How Majestic Is Your Name " #2023 x 2

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

O Lord, we praise your name. O Lord, we magnify your name:

Prince of Peace, mighty God; O Lord God Almighty.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

God of compassion, in Jesus Christ you reveal the light of your glory, but we turn away, distracted by our own plans. We confess we speak when we should listen, and act when we should wait. Forgive our aimless wanderings. Grant us wisdom to live in the light that shines from your beloved Son, our Savior. (silent prayer of personal confession)Amen.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." We believe and although we fall short, we must persevere to the end. Hold tight to His Word. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Holy Ground" # 2272 x 2

We are standing on holy ground and I know there are angels all around. Let us praise Jesus now; we are standing in His presence on holy ground.

An Unnerving Experience

Mark 9:2-13

A woman from a military family tells a humorous story. Her father was stationed at the naval base in New London, Connecticut. Then he received orders that he was to be transferred to Hawaii. The family excitedly prepared for the move. Since dogs and cats have to be quarantined for 120 days upon their arrival in the Hawaiian Islands, they sent their family cat ahead of them. Then the father's orders were canceled.

The family didn't realize their circumstances were of particular interest to anyone else until the father's parents sent them a clipping from their small town's newspaper. The headline on the story read: "CAT VACATIONS IN HAWAII FAMILY STAYS HOME."

We all have our favorite vacation spots. For some, it is the beach; for others, it is the mountains. Our text for today focuses on the mountains.

Jesus once asked his closest disciples Peter, James and John to join him on a hike up a mountain. We have no evidence that it was a harrowing climb it was no Everest but what happened on the top of that mountain was still unnerving.

It had been a very busy week for Jesus and his disciples. The disciples witnessed their Master feed a multitude of people with just a few loaves and fishes. They then saw him give vision to a man who was, for all practical purposes, blind. Then he revealed to them his mission as the Messiah and predicted his death and resurrection, and swore them to secrecy. Then, says Mark, "After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone."

It's nice imagery, if you think about it. Peter, James and John vigorous young men, maybe in their early twenties following their young rabbi, only about 31 or 32 himself climbing up this tall mountain. It was probably great fun and fellowship. Like young men everywhere, they were probably competitive about the climb. They probably teased the one who brought up the rear. "Look at me," one of them would have shouted, as he climbed out on a steep ledge. Reminds me of the last words of a redneck, "Watch this!" These were healthy, fun-loving young men on a grand excursion.

These were the three disciples whom Jesus was most comfortable with as he went about teaching and healing. These were also the three whom he trusted most with his mission of redeeming the world. So he invited them to climb with him up to a high mountain summit. Little did Peter, James and John realize what lay in store for them.

There they stood on the mountain when suddenly Jesus was "transfigured" right before their eyes. We don't know exactly what that means, but according to the Gospels, Jesus' "clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus."

Imagine that! His garments turned a dazzling white and Moses, the law-giver, and Elijah, the prophet, were brought back from the dead to talk with him. Jesus, their young teacher, was talking with these venerable historical figures face-to-face! What were Peter, James and John to make of

all of this? Was it a dream? Were they hallucinating? Something was happening, that's for sure the likes of which they had never experienced before.

Of course, it was Simon Peter said who spoke up. "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here," he said. "Let us put up three shelters one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Then Mark adds parenthetically that Peter "did not know what to say, they were so frightened." That's so Peter! You can bet they were frightened. What has happening here? It was more than they could process.

Then, just as mysteriously, says Mark, "a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'" Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

"As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead."

My guess is that this was one command that was easy to carry out. After all, who would have believed them? Only after Christ's resurrection from the grave would this story have made sense.

What does it all mean, this scene on the Mount of Transfiguration? Let me make some suggestions.

First of all, we have affirmed here the importance of the Old Testament witness. This is important. Many mainline believers are not quite certain what to do with the Old Testament. Christians who are literal in their interpretation of the scriptures have no problem, of course, with the Old Testament. God said it, I believe it! However, if we take every verse in the Bible literally, then logically it follows that every portion of the scripture has equal value. That verse in Isaiah 16 that speaks of God's judgment and says, "infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives ravished (16:16)" has to carry as much weight as the verse in Matthew 19 that says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these (14)."

For some people, this is no problem, but it's not quite so simple for mainline Christians who believe that Jesus revealed to us definitively the nature of God. We believe that all scripture is to be interpreted in light of who Jesus was and is. So there are many parts of the Old Testament that give us problems. We try to skip over them and pretend they do not exist. However, this scene on the Mount of Transfiguration is a reminder to us not to throw the baby out with the bath water. Our faith is built on the entire biblical narrative, Old Testament and New. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the same God whose nature Christ revealed. Christ did not come to destroy the faith of his fathers, but to "fill it full." (Matthew 5:17)

Christ came to affirm the Hebrew Bible, but also to throw new light on its meaning. That is why he was often heard to say, "You have heard it said . . ., but I say to you . . ."

Does it matter how you interpret scripture? Indeed, it does. J. Stephen Lang tells a powerful story of a man who misinterpreted a portion of the Bible, with tragic results.

In the tense years before the American Civil War, says Lang, many American slave owners feared a bloody uprising of the slaves. Perhaps this was out of extreme guilt. However, the fears seemed to come to life in the person of Nat Turner, a preacher and ex-slave who led a slave revolt in Virginia in 1831. He and his followers murdered more than 50 whites, and Turner was caught and hanged.

Turner knew the Bible well, says Lang, but like many revolutionary leaders, he chose to ignore the Bible's teachings on forgiveness and compassion. Instead, he focused his attention on verses such as Exodus 21:16 which reads like this: "Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death." In Turner's opinion, the passage justified the murder of slaveholders."

History is replete with examples of people who have abused scripture, who have interpreted it to satisfy their own selfish aims. But a knowledge of the scriptures, both Old Testament and New, gives us a strong foundation for building a healthy and informed faith.

Jesus quoted time after time from the Old Testament. For example, one of his favorite books seems to have been the book of Deuteronomy. When the devil came to tempt him in the wilderness, each time Satan advanced a temptation, the Master answered with a verse from Deuteronomy (Matthew 4: 4-10). When he was asked about the great commandment, Christ's answer also came straight from Deuteronomy: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (6:5). Three of his most famous, "You have heard it said . . ., but I say to you . . ." statements are from Deuteronomy: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Deut. 5:17, Mt. 5:21-22). "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Deut. 5:18; Mt. 5:27-28). "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Deut. 19:21; Mt. 5:38-39). Jesus knew the Old Testament and he wants us to know it too.

So, we have here on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus in the presence of the prophet Elijah and Moses the law-giver, central figures in the Old Testament. We cannot ignore our roots. Our faith is built on the entire biblical narrative.

The center of our faith, however, is Jesus. Notice how this Transfiguration story ends. After Elijah's and Moses' dramatic appearance, says Mark, just as mysteriously, "a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'" Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus." That's significant. Moses and Elijah had been with them, but now, "they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus."

Writer Bruce Larson tells about going with his wife and another couple to see the first episode of the movie series, "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Larson says that three members of their group thought the movie was disgusting violent, shallow, and two-dimensional but he, Bruce Larson, loved the movie. It's a guy thing, I guess.

The plot, you may remember, revolved around two archaeological teams during World War II racing across the Egyptian desert to find the Ark of the Covenant. One team wanted to capture it for Hitler, and the other, headed by a renegade American archeologist, wanted it for the free world. Larson says it was interesting that the movie producers would bet on public interest in the Ark of the Covenant. The Jews believed, in Old Testament times, and even now, that the Ark is the symbol of God with us. The Ark represented the presence of God Himself.

The movie builds up to the moment when the Ark is opened and all hell (or judgment) breaks loose. But Larson says that this is theologically unsound. If someone could find the Ark someday, he contends, and it is opened, he doesn't think anything will happen. Says Bruce Larson, "Just as the Ark was a sacramental symbol of God's old covenant with His people and represented God's presence with us, Jesus is the new Ark of the Covenant, and one of His names is Emmanuel, which means God with us. We worship the new Ark of the Covenant. God has given us His power and presence in His Son."

We treasure the scriptures, both Old Testament and New. But the center of our faith is Jesus. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the new Ark of the Covenant. If you come to a passage in scripture you do not understand, think about Jesus. Does the passage reflect the love and compassion of Christ? If not, then it is probably one that Jesus would say to us, "You have heard it said . . ., but I say to you . . ." Christ is the perfect revelation of the Creator. As the voice said to the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" That is the good news for the day: Listen to Christ!

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn

"Shine, Jesus, Shine"

2173

1. Lord, the light of your love is shining in the midst of the darkness, shining Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us Set us free by the truth you now bring us. Shine on me, shine on me.

Refrain:

Shine, Jesus, shine fill this land with the Father's glory, blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire; flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy, send forth your word Lord, and let there be light.

2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence from the shadows into your radiance; by the blood I may enter your brightness; search me, try me, consume all my darkness Shine on me, shine on me.

Refrain:

Shine, Jesus, shine fill this land with the Father's glory, blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire; flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy, send forth your word Lord, and let there be light.

3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness, so our faces display your likeness; ever changing from glory to glory, mirrored here may our lives tell your story. Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain:

Shine, Jesus, shine fill this land with the Father's glory, blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire; flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy, send forth your word Lord, and let there be light.

Blessing

Jesus says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen. Revelation 22:20-21