

“Listen!”
Mark 9:2-9
Sermon #89
Transfiguration Sunday
49th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
2.14.21

Mark 9:2-9 CEB

2 Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain where they were alone. He was transformed in front of them, 3 and his clothes were amazingly bright, brighter than if they had been bleached white. 4 Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Rabbi, it’s good that we’re here. Let’s make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 6 He said this because he didn’t know how to respond, for the three of them were terrified.

7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the cloud, “This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!” 8

Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Human One had risen from the dead.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Transfiguration Sunday comes every year and I wonder every time: What do I have to offer as we look at this passage together? I

guess this time, Transfiguration Sunday is different. Last year on Transfiguration Sunday, we were mere days from the official declaration of COVID-19 being a pandemic.

Life before March 10, 2020 seemed so much more manageable. At least, we seemed to understand things much better than we do now. I, for one, catch myself saying something like “If only we could...” or “Remember when...” I’m sure many of you have, too. It was August or September before I took down the big post-it notes that I used for our cottage meetings earlier in 2020. That was my way to let go of what was.

There’s no turning back. As we venture through this crisis and rediscover ourselves, the new normal will not be the normal

pre-March 10, 2020, just like the new normal that took over post-September 11, 2001 didn't look like pre-September 11, 2001.

For Peter, James, and John, while the Transfiguration is not a crisis per se, it is a crisis in that what these disciples have known and believed for a long time has been turned upside down! They think they know Jesus, they think they know the Law and the Prophets, but yet, they are just now getting to scratch the surface. Jesus transforms before them and then suddenly, Elijah and Moses appear and they are talking to Jesus! These disciples are scared. And rightly so.

Of course, Peter has something to say that isn't quite helpful.

Verses five and six say:

Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus,

“Rabbi, it’s good that we’re here. Let’s make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He said this because he didn’t know how to respond, for the three of them were terrified.

Mark is right. Peter didn’t know how to respond. He lets the fear get the best of him. And instead of responding, Peter reacts.

Responding and reacting are different. Response is typically based on thought. Reaction is typically based on emotion.

Peter wants to build three shrines. Rightfully so because there’s no doubt Moses and Elijah are important in the faith of Peter and they continue to be for us. But, Peter misses something in the previous eight chapters before the Transfiguration—feeding of the 4,000,

healing a deaf man, casting out demons, healing Peter's mother-in-law from the fever—Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets. With Jesus, God in the Flesh, the journey continues forward as God continues to be on the loose in our world.

Circumstances change. With God on the loose in our world, in the midst of change, we don't have to give up the teachings from our past that make up our foundation. The Law and the Prophets, Moses and Elijah, stand next to Jesus, who fulfills the Law and the Prophets.

Things change, however, and it's scary. Certainly, Moses and Elijah's ministries are to be honored. Their lives, ministries, and teachings still inform our faith! Maybe Peter wants to live in the "what was", "if only we could", or the "remember when". He wants

to stay stuck with the shrines. But, Jesus has other plans because.....God is on the loose!

Possibly, that's where we are. We want to build the shrines to "what was", "if only we could", or "remember when". Change is hard. Change is scary.

This past week, I met with some colleagues about a possible outdoor gathering. We tried to think of a date and settle upon the weekend of Reformation Sunday as a time to possibly safely gather, if things improve. Honestly, Reformation weekend makes sense as October 31, 1517 became a flashpoint that eventually led to the creation of Protestant Churches, including Presbyterians. A new normal occurred after Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the

Wittenburg door. A new normal is taking shape now. And there's still so much unknown.

And then in the conversation with my colleagues, we talked about possible topics for this gathering. Do we simply move on? Do we make it a gathering to aid us in the journey to find our groove again? Do we acknowledge the magnitude of communal trauma that hasn't been experienced since World War II? Do we acknowledge that we're not out of the woods, yet?

It's not our calling to build shrines for the past because.....God is on the loose. We honor our past. Yes. There's so much to learn from it. The past informs our present. Jesus didn't abolish the Law and the Prophets, but he fulfilled the Law and the Prophets through

his life, death, and resurrection. But, y'all, just because we are in the process of vaccinations, doesn't mean we simply move on as if nothing happened. The new normal, whatever that is, is here to stay. Jesus led Peter, James, and John off the mountain because there was ministry to do. And I ask you this: What do you think moving off the mountain and away from the shrines we have built looks like for us as we struggle with the questions of moving forward acknowledging reality?

In Peter's emotional reaction, he wanted to stay in that moment and build three shrines to it. Today, people want to build and live in different shrines. Sometimes, the shrines represent moments in life. For example, some have built the shrine to 1955 thinking that the Church should still operate in that way. I happen to like the 90s and have built my own shrines to it as that was a time of relative

peace in the world and there was an innocence that was stripped away in late 2001. As much as we want to romanticize the past—1955, the 90s, or whenever— they weren't good for everyone. We can certainly learn from them and they inform our present.

However, let me say.....God is on the loose. God is on the loose in Mark's Gospel and is on the loose right now. God continues to work in ways beyond our comprehension. Hopefully that scares you just a little bit AND ultimately comforts you. And because God is on the loose in our frightened world, that's Good News for everyone, regardless of who they are.

The time is now to follow our Savior off the mountain. The time is now to move away from the shrines we have built or attempted to build acting as if they are to the glory of God, when they do nothing

except offer a false sense of security. The false sense of security that trusts in no one but ourselves.

It's okay to be scared of the future. It's okay to have an emotional reaction. It's called being human. But, as Jesus has shown us in all his dazzling glory on the mountain as he stands in between the Law and the Prophets, God holds the future and God is on the loose.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.