

February 27, 2022
Rev. Kerry Smith

God is Calling, What Do We Do?
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 9:28-36

New Revised Standard Version

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

I love the word liminal. Do you know that word? It means threshold. It refers to a transitional time, like when you've decided to get married but you haven't had the wedding yet. Or you have decided to separate from your spouse, but the divorce isn't final yet. Or you are interviewing for a new job, but you haven't been hired yet. It's like the time between childhood and adulthood, a transitional time. There are liminal places too, like an airport; you're not where you're going yet but you're not at home anymore either.

Today is a liminal day in the church. We're walking from the season of Epiphany into the next season of Lent, a season where we journey with Jesus toward the cross. We call today Transfiguration Sunday and hear this story of Jesus becoming who he was created to be. It was a turning point for Jesus, a threshold moment. This miraculous thing happens when Jesus is praying with Peter, James, and John. Imagine if you were there. Maybe you're wondering what Jesus is praying about when right before your eyes the appearance of Jesus' face changes. His clothes become dazzling white. He is glowing and it is almost blinding.

Then, to make the day even wilder, Moses and Elijah show up and begin talking to Jesus. Moses, the great law giver, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, start talking to Jesus about his departure. The word in Greek for departure is like the word in Hebrew for exodus. Moses led people on an exodus from slavery to freedom, and now they are talking about Jesus' exodus. What freedom will Jesus lead his people towards?

Peter wants to hold onto the moment, maybe build a memorial to it. We hunger for closeness with God, and when it comes, we want to capture it and hang onto it. We want to remember that joy, that hope, that deep peace that comes in those moments. Then, a cloud comes and covers everyone up. You can't see faces, but you could hear a voice, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" This was a thin place, a place where you can't quite tell where heaven ends and earth begins. It was one of those experiences where God's presence could be felt in a real way.

I remember being at my Grandpa's bedside in the hospital when death was near. I felt such peace and love from him. My Grandpa taught me about generosity. I remember being with him at a Sears, is Sears still a thing?, and a Sears employee carried the new microwave my Grandpa had purchased to his car. In that five minute walk my Grandpa learned this young man's life story and that he was working and going to community college. My Grandpa gave him a sizable donation right on the spot. I remember standing with my Grandpa in church while we were supposed to be singing a hymn, but he wasn't singing! I asked him why and he said he couldn't. I told him if you can talk you can sing, and so he started to sing, and he really was a pretty terrible singer. My Grandpa moved to our neighborhood when I was in elementary school

and I grew up going to his house after school. He would make me chocolate chip cookies and often have us over for dinner. To see how my mom cared for her dad as he got older was the greatest lesson for me about family and love and being there for one another.

I can close my eyes and feel like I'm back in that hospital room with my Grandpa when I felt God's presence. What was a moment when you could feel God's presence? It could be as you watched a sunrise or a sunset, or as you listened to music. Perhaps it was a moment when tears were coming down your cheeks, maybe while you were watching the Disney movie *Encanto*? Perhaps it was a moment when God spoke to you maybe through a dream, or a word of scripture, or in a conversation you were having with someone else.

Thomas Merton talks about an experience he had when he said, "in Louisville at the corner of Fourth and Walnut I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs—it was like waking from a dream of separateness. To take your place as a member of the human race. I had the immense joy of being man—a member of the race in which God became incarnate. If only everybody could realize this. But it cannot be explained—there is no way of telling people that they are all walking round shining like the sun."¹

This Wednesday Lent begins, an opportunity for us to take forty days to choose something that will help us go deeper in our understanding of who Jesus is or what our lives have to do with God. Forty days to think about how God is calling us and what we are going to do about it. Forty days to go with Jesus to the mountain to pray and to think about what it means to listen to Jesus.

I love that this story happens while the disciples are trying to pray. It makes me think about what we expect in prayer. Why is it that we pray? What experiences do we have when we pray? What is revealed to us when we pray? How are we changed when we pray? I always thought that I needed to have a prayer nook in my house. You know, a chair and a table for a candle. A place that said, "praying happens here." But, when I tried to create that in my house, it became the favorite sitting place for our dog, and our dog has white hair so when I would sit there I would be covered in white hair. What ended up working better for me was incorporating prayer into my daily life in normal ways. Praying in the shower, praying while I brush my teeth, praying while I drive or walk down the aisles of the grocery store, praying while I load the dishwasher and fold the clothes. Listening to God in quiet and also having a conversation with God in my head.

Lent is an opportunity for you to try something new. Maybe you want to read a Gospel all the way through. I suggest starting with Mark because it is the shortest and the most exciting. There are lots of things happening immediately, right away, and at once in Mark. Maybe you'll want to pray the same prayer every morning, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." Or you might want to ask God to show you how to use your passion to make a difference in this world.

Jesus is inviting us to the mountaintop to be with him while we pray. We are invited to climb to the top of the mountain, laugh together, look around for the right place to sit, admire the beauty of the mountain, and marvel at the colors in the sunset. When Peter, John, and James saw Jesus' glory they didn't understand because it was so wonderful, so terrifying, and so weird that they kept silent. There are some encounters that we have with the holy where we have a similar experience. We keep silent because we don't know how to express the joy, the peace, the

¹ Thomas Merton. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*.

feelings that we had. It's like we need hindsight. We have forty days to take our time and contemplate.

Jesus then calls us down into the world. Listen to him!, God says. We need that voice as we go into our world filled with dissension and conflict. Our souls, our resolve, and our courage will be tested as we pray for peace, that the war machine will fail, that the victims will be comforted. Lent is an opportunity for us to move into the future with healing in our hearts. If we are still and quiet, we can be guided by the voice of Jesus, the beloved, the prophet, the teacher, the healer, the voice of the outcast and outsider. It is a voice that can guide us through the thickest of clouds. As we come down the mountain may we be overcome by awe and ultimately joy. Thanks be to God, Amen.