

Transfiguration C Sermon
Luke 9:28-36
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*“Being **Here**”*

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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.

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Imagine, if you will, being one of the three disciples who climbed up the side of the mountain with Jesus that day. Peter, James, and John probably assumed that Jesus simply wanted some company on a long hike or some prayer partners for another one of his long wilderness prayer vigils. Maybe they thought they’d just be doing a little sightseeing. Whatever they may have thought, it must have been quite a shock when, all of a sudden, he lit up like a Christmas tree!

Merriam Webster defines a transfiguration as a change in form or appearance—a metamorphosis. That’s certainly part of what the disciples experienced on that mountain top according to Luke. Jesus just started shining like a lite-brite—his clothes, whiter than any fuller on earth could’ve bleached them. But then, the story gets down right weird. Two guys who’d been dead for centuries showed up and started shooting the breeze with Jesus: Moses (who led the Israelites out of Egypt, was on a first-name bases with God, and delivered the covenant of the 10 commandments) and Elijah (one of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, a notorious trouble-maker, and, according to scripture, the only guy in history who didn’t die, but went to heaven via flaming chariot!).

As expected, the disciples in Luke’s gospel didn’t know what to make of this. Peter broke the silence: “Master, it is good for us to be here.” One can imagine Jesus nodding politely, hoping to return to his conversation with the dead saints. But, as per usual, Peter never seemed to quit while he was ahead. He continued, “let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” This odd suggestion doesn’t even warrant a response from Jesus. Even Luke’s author admits that Peter didn’t really know what to say, only that he and the others were terrified.

Then a cloud enveloped all six of them and a voice from the cloud boomed, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” Finally, the lights went out. The strange apparitions disappeared. Jesus returned to normal. And they headed back down the mountain as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

Commentators and scholars have written extensively on the story of the Transfiguration and they all agree that it’s a weird story! Ok, maybe they don’t *all* think it’s a weird story, but they have written extensively on the bizarre events on the mountain top that Luke describes. As I considered what specifically I wanted to focus on as we explore the text this week, one thing really jumped out at me – Peter’s suggestion of building three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

I love to hike and to camp, but even those who don't know the difference between going on a hike and going camping. When you go for a hike, you plan to return that day. When you go camping, you pitch a tent because you plan to stay awhile. Peter was apparently expecting that Jesus and his glowing companions planned to remain on that mountain top and he thought they might as well pitch tents for them to spend the night in.

That's where I think Peter went wrong, where he missed the point completely. He was right when he told Jesus that it was good for them to be there. He was right. But he messed up when he jumped out of the moment and ahead to making preparations for the night. Being there in that moment with Jesus was the point of the whole story—the whole experience!

So often, we too focus on what there is still to do, on the next thing, the next moment, the next day, or week, or month, or year that we, like Peter, completely miss the point—of being right here, right now, in this moment. *That* is the point. This very moment, right here, right now, is all we are guaranteed in this life. And every moment is a gift.

In his book, “The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari,” Robin Sharma tells a story that beautifully illustrates this point. Not by accident, I think, the main character's name is Peter. Here's the story:

Peter was a young boy who could never live in the moment. When he was in school, he dreamed of being outside playing. When he was outside playing, he dreamed of his summer vacation. Peter constantly daydreamed, never taking the time to savor the special moments that filled his days.

One morning, Peter was out walking in a forest near his home. Feeling tired, he decided to rest on a patch of grass and eventually dozed off. After only a few minutes of deep sleep, he heard someone calling his name. “Peter! Peter!” came the shrill

voice from above. As he slowly opened his eyes, he was startled to see [an old] woman standing above him. In this woman's wrinkled hand was a magical little ball with a hole in the center and out of the hole dangled a long, golden thread.

“Peter,” she said, “this is the thread of your life. If you pull the thread just a bit, an hour will pass in seconds. If you pull harder, whole days will pass in minutes. And if you pull with all your might, months—even years—will pass by in days.” [Peter excitedly took the ball.]

The next day, Peter was sitting in the classroom feeling restless and bored. Suddenly, he remembered his new toy. As he pulled a little bit of the golden thread, he quickly found himself playing in his garden.

Realizing the power of the magic thread, Peter soon grew tired of being a schoolboy and longed to be a teenager, with all the excitement that phase of life would bring. So again, he held the ball and pulled hard on the golden thread. Suddenly, he was a teenager with a very pretty girlfriend named Elise. But Peter still wasn't content. He had never learned to enjoy the moment and to explore the simple wonders of every stage of his life. Instead, he dreamed of being an adult, so again he pulled hard on the thread and many years flew by in an instant.

Now he found that he was transformed into a middle-aged adult. Elise was now his wife and Peter was surrounded by a houseful of kids. But Peter noticed something else. His once jet-black hair had started to turn grey and his once youthful mother, whom he loved so dearly had grown old and frail. Yet Peter still could not live in the moment. He had never learned to live in the now, so once again, he pulled on the magic thread and waited for the changes to appear.

Peter now found that he was a ninety-year-old man. His thick dark hair had turned white as snow and his beautiful young wife, Elise, had also grown old and had passed away a few years earlier. His wonderful children had grown up and left home to lead lives of their own. For the first time in his entire life, Peter realized that he had not taken the time to embrace the wonders of living. Instead, he had hurried through life, never resting to see all that was good along the way.

Peter became very sad at this discovery. He decided to go out to the forest where he used to walk as a boy to clear his head and warm his spirit. He laid down on a small patch of grass and fell into a deep slumber.

After only a minute, he heard someone calling out to him. “Peter! Peter!” cried the voice. He looked up in astonishment to see that it was none other than the old woman who had given him the ball with the magic golden thread many years earlier. “How have you enjoyed my special gift?” she asked.

“At first it was fun, but now I hate it.” he responded bluntly, “My whole life has passed before my eyes without giving me the chance to enjoy it. Sure, there would have been sad times as well as great times, but I haven’t had the chance to experience either. I feel empty inside. I have missed the gift of living.”

“You are very ungrateful,” said the old woman. “Still, I will give you one last wish.”

“I’d like to go back to being a schoolboy and live my life over again,” Peter quickly responded.

He then returned to his deep sleep. Again, he heard someone calling his name and opened his eyes. “Who could it be this time?” he wondered. When he opened his eyes, he was absolutely delighted to see his mother standing over his bedside. She looked young, healthy

and radiant. Peter realized that the strange woman from the forest had indeed granted his wish and he had returned to his former life.

He went on to live a full life, one rich with many delights, joys and triumphs, but it all started when he stopped sacrificing the present for the future and began to live in the moment.¹

Friends, there's no question that there are times in our lives we'd just as soon skip over. There's no question that right now, we're living with a good deal of uncertainty. The anxious among us, myself included, struggle with uncertainty. We struggle not knowing what will happen in Europe in light of Russia's decision to invade Ukraine last week. We struggle not knowing how it will affect the economy, the stock market, and our 401k's. We struggle not knowing for sure when this pandemic will end. We struggle not knowing if things will get back to "normal." But the truth is, we can't know the future. Wishing to skip over the uncertainty, or the boredom, or the pain of the present, also puts us in a mental and emotional state to miss all that's beautiful and good in the present moment: jazz music and Fat Sunday, time with friends and neighbors, beautiful moments with children, chocolate. Who wants to miss any of that?

Whether we're on one of life's mountain tops, in one of the valleys, on the level path that goes through the center, or on one of the myriad stops in between, each and every moment is precious. If there's one thing we can learn from Luke's Transfiguration story, let us remember that it is good for us to be here—right here, right now. That is enough. May it be so. Amen.

¹ Robin S. Sharma, The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari, New York: Harper Collins, 1997.