

Exodus 24:12-18
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

Matthew 17

¹Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While 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!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹As 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."

Jesus' ministry certainly had its ups and downs. At the very beginning, he was baptized and a voice came out of heaven and proclaimed him God's beloved son and there was a dove and a good deal of excitement. The next thing we know, Jesus was out in the desert. He hadn't eaten for forty days and his only company was Satan himself.

We all know the Palm Sunday story. Jesus was riding into the capital city, Jerusalem. To this day it is considered a holy city by three world religions. And everybody was proclaiming Jesus the Messiah. And they are waving palms and singing. Now Jesus has arrived. Now everything will be all right. In four days Jesus was on his knees in Gethsemane - confused, sweating blood, and asking God about options.

We like to think in terms of progression – things getting better and better – things moving down the line until they reach a conclusion.

We like to think that way about our lives and we like to think that way about our relationship with God. We like to think that the older we get, the more we understand, the farther along we go in our relationship with God. We are going to reach a conclusion of

personal holiness. Or, in some cases, people think they *have* reached a conclusion of personal holiness.

Jesus' ministry reads differently. It seems that every time we see Jesus is settling in as God Almighty, something human comes along and spoils it. That happy ending always seems just out of reach. Jesus keeps turning out to be human. And the story will not end.

Maybe the best example we have is the Transfiguration. This story in the Gospel is second only to the resurrection in providing an understanding of Jesus as true God. His face shown! Jesus' clothes were white.

The voice comes out of a cloud - the voice of God – and it says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Jesus has made it to the top of the mountain. All he has been trying to do has reached a conclusion.

Peter says, "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." We've made it to the mountain-top. Let's build booths and stay right here.

It's sort of the "once saved, always saved" theory of discipleship. Once we've made it to the mountain-top - we're not going back down.

So, this morning we celebrate the glorious transfiguration that identifies Jesus Christ once and for all. And we read about the followers of Christ (that's us) ready to park right there on the mountain top...and enjoy the fact that they are finished. They've reached their destination.

In three days we are going to be back in this same church with ashes on our heads, saying, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return". We will be reminding ourselves that these lives will not last forever.

It is the same pattern Jesus has been living since the beginning. A glorious baptism leads to wilderness temptation. A triumphal entry into the holy city gives way to lonely prayer in

the garden. The transfiguration story ends with Jesus and his disciples coming down from the mountain, and he set his face toward Jerusalem and the cross.

Is Jesus going to be the Son of Almighty God? Or is he going to be a human - subject to temptation, pain, and death?

We are people who like to move things along to a conclusion. We want to get finished with this story.

God seems determined that we will not get this story to a conclusion.

There on the mountain of the transfiguration the voice of God says, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased." This is God's son. He has come to a happy ending on a mountain-top.

But then God adds three words that change everything. "Listen to him!"

"Listen to him!"

That puts things right back in this world. Jesus is to be listened to. That has to do with living. It is more than seeing who Jesus is, it is how we *respond* to him – the decisions we make, the choices we choose. When God tells us to listen to Jesus, he is not giving us instructions for enjoying a happy ending. These are the words from God on how we are to go about the business of living the rest of our lives.

Jesus' spectacular appearance. the vision of Moses and Elijah, these are awe-inspiring visions of God. But the words "Listen to him!" are instructions that demand a response.

Jesus encourages his disciples. It is Jesus' hand that touches his followers and Jesus who says, "Rise, have no fear."

They went down the mountain, together.

They had Jesus with them. They were ready to resume life. They were ready to obey God's instructions to "Listen to him."

The transfiguration is an old story, but it is a familiar one.

It is a story of Jesus' followers ready to be through. We know Jesus. We have spent part of our lives awe-struck by the incarnation of God. There have been times when each of us has known deep in his soul who Jesus is and what he means. We have known God's love alive in the world...and coming to us. And we want that transfiguring experience to be a conclusion.

Look at us this morning. We gather in the church, around the baptismal font that reminds us that God has chosen us with his own grace.

We have heard God's own word in the Holy Bible. We are about to share the sacrament of the Lord's Supper – the real presence of Jesus Christ. We are surrounded by family and friends. Let's just build some booths and stay right here.

Often we think we're finally here at the top and, in many ways, we are satisfied with where we are. We can easily start thinking: Our lives are good enough. We have enough friends. We're happy with what we know about God, and God's will in our lives. Anything new and we might have to change our minds. We have gotten close enough to see the transfigured form of Jesus Christ. We are satisfied.

Let's just build some booths and stay right here.

Jesus says, "Rise, have no fear." Jesus tells us to go on living. We're not through yet. Just as he never finished living - so we will never finish living.

We are called to continue to listen to the beloved Son. We are called to continue to follow him back down the mountain. We are called to continue to live.

For all Jesus' radiance, there are still people who are hungry. There are people who do not know the freedom of God's love. There are children who need to grow up with the message that their church is a place of care and support and growth. Our families need to be loved. Our church needs to be supported. Our community needs to be served. It will cost time and money and energy and patience. Just when we thought we were all finished, we hear the words, "listen to him".

The message of The Transfiguration is not that the work is over. The message of The Transfiguration is we have the strength of God to continue the work. God has come into our lives as Jesus Christ. The same power that showed so clearly Jesus as God is the power that can live in you.

God's power is not to end. God's power is with you for life.

There is life out there, down the mountain. "Rise and have no fear."