

## **February 27, 2022 – Transfiguration Sunday**

<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” <sup>36</sup>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.

**Please join me in prayer.**

**Reading and meditating on your Word, O God, we are gathered before you this morning with heaviness on our hearts, confronted by a world that seems indifferent to your timeless message of love, justice and peace.**

**We struggle to hold these things together. Our hearts are outpouring in grief for all those who have been killed this week in the war in Ukraine, touched off by a dictator’s lies and greed. There’s no sense it seems to be made of senseless violence.**

**I want to offer you prayers this morning that ask for as little loss of life as necessary but recognize that some, perhaps thousands, are going to die in the days ahead, as too many already have. I ask for reminders that peace cannot really exist without justice and ask for your wisdom in producing that outcome.**

**You have permitted me to see, O God, that you are at work and your love is present in the people of Ukraine caring for one another and in the people of Russia who have stood up to be arrested for demanding an end to warmaking in their country's name. But you have also called your people to pray for our enemies. So I pray to you, O God, for a change, however unlikely, in the hearts of Vladimir Putin and the political, military and economic leaders of Russia and Belarus who choose to follow his lead. I ask, O God, that they and their families may not come to harm but to a humane form of justice that holds them responsible for crimes of war.**

**I ask God for patience, for wisdom in discernment, for humility and understanding, and for hope and strength to face the days ahead, with their many challenges for our world, for our own country and for the community we have made our home.**

**Amen.**

**The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ lasted but a brief, fleeting moment.**

**So often, that's all we get. A flash of God's brilliance. And like his disciples that day, we almost completely miss it. Sometimes, I'm sure we do miss it, and we don't even realize what wonder it is that has escaped us.**

**Those who accompanied him witnessed his glory, Peter burst out his uncontrollable excitement ... and before he finished what he said, or apparently even realized what he**

said, a cloud came over them, shook them with fear and stunned them to silence.

The Transfiguration didn't happen in a vacuum. They carried baggage with them up that mountain and they carried baggage back on down. Jesus' last words to his disciples were of revealing his identity as Messiah, his destiny of a cross, his death and resurrection, with the acknowledgement that discipleship involves the terrifying and confusing task of taking up one's own cross daily, a metaphor we still wrestle with understanding today.

When they go back down the mountain, they meet with the reality of the world's calamity, human frailty, possession by evil forces and the stone-set turn of Jesus' face toward Jerusalem and the inevitability of his fate there.

Essentially on the eve of our Lenten journey, maybe we can relate. It just seems to get worse before it gets better. We are close to two years into weathering a pandemic in which

**we've become wary of taking a step forward because it's up to this point led only to two steps back. The news of the world, the nation and the local community give cause for anger, fear, disillusionment and despair.**

**I don't know what Jesus and his disciples were praying about before his clothes turned white and his face dazzled bright or how God's Word resonated in their hearts and spirits in that time on the mountaintop. But I can't help but keep coming back to what has stood out in my heart and pushed me in recent weeks' lectionary Scriptures, informing my prayers. Just a week ago, we were exploring together what a difficult command Jesus gives us to love our enemies. And then I felt confronted Thursday by the reality of an enemy speaking lies and hate, dismissive of values of democracy, independence and self-determination I was raised to hold dear, when I watched Vladimir Putin's speech that ordered Russian troops and weapons into Ukraine.**

**Suddenly, it stopped being saber-rattling rhetoric and theoretical lives at stake but very real bombs taking the lives of people I'll admittedly never know, but nevertheless feel a certain connection to. Having witnessed the success of the protests and hearing the stories and the mixture of hope and concern of a seminary colleague who lived and ministered in Ukraine a few short years prior to that. Having prayed often for peace and resolution to the conflict there for the better part of the past decade.**

**Hundreds of lives have already been taken these last few days beginning with the words of one man. And yet, I hear Jesus' words echo and wonder ... wait, does God really want me, and want us, to pray for Vladimir Putin?**

**And at the same time, there also comes the conviction that just as Mary sang and prayed for justice and Zechariah broke his silence to do the same, and they held their hope in the person of Jesus from even before his birth into this**

**broken world ... justice is the right and prayerful cry of God's people in this time, too. Too often I have prayed these prayers as a neutral call for peace, without speaking to the necessary demand for the preservation of lives and freedom of Ukrainians unnecessarily threatened by the whims of the dictator next door.**

**How do we hold these things in tension? Love for enemies, longing for peace and the need for justice? These are all legitimate but not so easily reconciled.**

**Like Peter, John and James before you and me, I feel lulled on the edge of sleep. It seems very appealing to shut it all off, to tune it all out and not wrestle with these things. Rather than take a risk and try, to try while risking "doing it wrong," to instead remain stuck, hesitant, frozen and ready to jump at the opportunity to dive into diversions and distraction.**

**But if we do that, what will you and I miss?**

**A United Methodist colleague reminded me this week that the Transfiguration revealed to us Christ's glory so that we may be strengthened for bearing our own cross and for our own transformation into his likeness. It's no accident we celebrate it before delving into the Lenten disciplines of following the way of the cross and focus on remembering our baptismal promises to renounce sin and evil.**

**It's only a glimpse of Christ's light before the foreboding cloud rolls in, yes, this is most certainly true. But we are urged not to drift off to sleep and to keep alert to the light of God's glory as it is revealed in Jesus. And to hold that light in our hearts even when we can't see it around us.**

**That's hard. It's hard when the world does not look like it's at all full of God's glory and fulfillment of sacred promises at hand. It's hard when God's voice echoes, "Listen to him!" and we aren't sure how to make sense of what he's saying.**

**The example set out for us in this scene is one of Peter instinctively trying to hold on to this moment. To build a lasting and tangible something to make it last. That isn't really an option and it sounds silly but it's also not entirely wrong. It doesn't garner Jesus' rebuke as other half-baked exclamations from disciples do. There's something to this.**

**What can you and I hold onto and take into Lent as a guide and a source of strength for difficult days ahead? Admittedly, I find it has taken more energy to discern as of late. Accountability can be a useful tool. Gathering with the Via de Cristo group Friday evening and Real Life 101 yesterday morning helped me in this regard. Amidst the unhealthy practice of doomscrolling through news and social media (which to be fair is the also-harmful opposite of sleepful ignorance and something I need to work on), I made a point to look for the inspiration of God's goodness unfolding in these circumstances.**

**The photos of people holding and comforting one another in subways that became bomb shelters. The outpourings of water, food, shelter and welcome at Ukraine's western borders to the thousands fleeing. The viral posts of information helpful to those seeking refuge and safety that made a point to counter the lies and misinformation spread in Russian propaganda. The courage and determination of Ukrainian leadership and rank-and-file alike. Those same attributes among peace protestors in cities throughout Russia. These I could see and know.**

**And there is also the aspects of faith that must remain unsatisfied by certainty but help to bolster hope. Three years ago, quilts we sent off from Messiah Lutheran Church in my former parish were tracked and we learned that they made their way to Ukraine. I don't know any more than that. But I hope and I pray that they are with someone now in that**

**faraway land bringing warmth, comfort and a reminder that people -- total strangers -- care, and pray for them.**

**The light and life-giving Spirit of God can look dim in the midst of death-dealing and evil running rampant. But they never disappear, they can never be taken away. They can be hidden, but God promises they are there. You and I have to trust that promise and hold the light of it in our hearts each new day. And help fan that flame in one another.**

**Amen and amen.**