

Eyewitnesses

Mark 9:2-8, 2 Peter 1:16-21

February 11, 2024 (Transfiguration)

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I have a confession for you all—Transfiguration Sunday is one of my least favorite days to preach. It's not that I dislike the Transfiguration or don't think it's important, because it is. At the Transfiguration, God again names and claims Jesus as God's own beloved Child, fully God and fully human. But, it is so hard to find something interesting or new to say about the Transfiguration. I have heard countless sermons and even given a couple myself about how we can't stay up on the mountain in the glory and wonder of it all, but we have to come down off the mountain. It's a good word. It's an important word.

And maybe that's the point, we need to be reminded again and again that Jesus *is* the Son of God—fully God and fully human. We need to be reminded again and again that we have to come down off the mountain and get to work. We need to be reminded and fully commit ourselves each year to bearing witness to and participating in the work of Christ in the world.

The writer of 2 Peter, finds himself in a frustrating position. There are folks in the community who are trying to discredit the eyewitness accounts of Peter, James, and John. Peter, James, and John are being accused of basing their teachings on their own, personal interpretations. It was being spread that Jesus wasn't really the Son of God, wasn't really fully human and fully divine. People are unsure what to believe. They are unsure as to who Jesus really is. They are unsure who they should listen to and who they should follow.

So the writer calls his readers back to the Transfiguration, back to that glorious, mountaintop moment and says—we were eyewitnesses to Jesus. Eyewitnesses to his life, to his ministry, to the relationships he built, to the way he challenged the powers and principalities of this world, to the way he challenged empire, to the way he always stood on the side of the oppressed, the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the prisoner. Eyewitnesses to his transfiguration. Eyewitnesses to the cloud that enveloped all of them and the voice that came out of the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

The writer wants there to be no doubt among his readers as to who Christ really is and the way he lived. He wants them to cling to that truth so that they may be able to discern what truly is the way and work of Christ and what is not. He wants them to be able to see and participate in the true work of Christ that is happening in the world around them. Because while his readers may not have been eyewitnesses to the transfiguration, they are eyewitnesses to the work of Christ around them. They just have to be willing to see it and willing to share it.

The writer wants there to be no doubt among his readers as to who Christ really is and the way he lived, and part of me thinks that's the easy part—knowing who Jesus is and how he lived his life, and knowing that we are to do likewise. We know these things, but following Jesus is not easy. Following Jesus means that we don't always get to do exactly what we want to do.

Following Jesus means that sometimes we are completely wrong about some things, and that we need to acknowledge and repent of those things. Following Jesus means that we stand where he stood, we stand with who he stood even though other people may say that what we are doing is wrong. Following Jesus means that we challenge the powers and principalities of our world, standing against empire in all its forms even though it may cost us. Following Jesus means we do all things in love and out of love even when it's for those who are hard to love. Following Jesus means that we are never doing this work alone. Following Jesus is far from easy, and sometimes it is downright frustrating, but it is good. It is good.

Friends, we were eyewitnesses to following the way of Jesus this morning. Did you see it? Did you feel the wind of the Spirit as she blew through the room? Did you see the light reflect off the drops of water? Did you see it?

In baptism, we are buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in the newness of life. In baptism, the one being baptized affirms their faith in Christ and promises to follow him in word and deed throughout their life. Let me tell y'all, there is something in that water, something happens in the water in that moment of baptism—you might call it a transfiguration. And much like the actual transfiguration, I promise you that nothing is the same after that, nothing is the same.

Whenever I get to witness or perform a baptism, I hear that old familiar hymn begin to play in my head:

I have decided to follow Jesus;

I have decided to follow Jesus;

I have decided to follow Jesus;

No turning back, no turning back

And as I hear it and begin to sing along in my head or even sometimes hum the tune aloud, I am reminded of my own promise made in the baptismal waters years ago, and I know that there is no turning back.

It takes all of us to follow the way of Jesus. None of us can do it alone. We need each other. We need each and every unique member of the body of Christ, because each and every unique member is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Each and every unique member brings more flavor to a world that needs it. Each and every unique member helps the light shine brighter no matter how hard the powers and principalities try to snuff it out.

Friends, remember, that you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. So go out into the world and be exactly who you are—exactly who God created you to be, letting your light shine.