

# “Transfiguration”

Mark 9:2-9

Sermon notes from the pulpit of  
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois  
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On Sunday mornings, we are greeted and welcomed to worship. We are welcomed to this place that is often filled with sunlight, and is always filled with the warmth of Christian community. Sometimes the words, “Welcome home” are shared. Church. Worship. Community. Reunion. Body of Christ. Household of God. *Welcome home.*

After the prayer of confession, we join in the assurance of pardon. We assure one another, using words drawn from scripture, that we are forgiven for our sins. We are invited to let go of the old life and lean into the new life. We often use words like, “By the grace of God in Jesus Christ, be at peace.”

And we pass that peace. We shake hands. We extend greetings. Some of us hug, wink, wave, bow, nod.

What we are saying, I think, is we belong together here in God’s embrace. Everybody belongs. God loves us. God welcomes us. This is a thin place, holy space, the very opposite of the rat race. This is our home, a resting place, a learning place, a sanctuary. *Welcome.*

*Welcome home.*

At some point in the service, many of us feel so welcomed, we get comfortable in our seats, and the music, and the preaching lull us, lull us, rock-and-roll us to such peace that we doze. It’s comfortable. We are glad to be here. This good. Let’s stay awhile, and donuts and coffee await us, or brunch.

Peter, James, and John may have felt similarly content on that mountain in today’s text. Jesus hauls these friends up the mountain, and he becomes transfigured in bright light. Moses and Elijah show up out of thin air, gilded by glory.

God speaks up: “This is my son, the beloved. Listen to him.” These disciples were discombobulated, but Peter, brash Peter, speaks up and suggests, “*It is good for us to be here. Let’s get comfortable. We’ll build tents here, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah. We’ll hang hammocks. I’ll start a fire; the other guys can go fetch some food.*”

Mark suggests that because Peter was terrified, he was just blathering. He didn’t know what to say, so he mentioned tents (or dwelling places, or tabernacles). Regardless of his fear, he wanted to stay. And he wanted everyone to be comfortable even if he was not.

Weather comfortable or terrified, Peter was willing to make provision to stay on this mountain top, with some of the All Stars of the Old Testament—Elijah and Moses, for goodness sake—and their brilliant friend Jesus. Let’s stay. Take off your shoes. Put on your slippers.

That’s how I feel about worship with God’s people. Precovid, this church had three services every Sunday. I loved going from the 8 o’clock, to the 9 o’clock, to the 11:15. I was tired at the end of the morning, sure, but I sang with the Psalmist: “I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122).

This text is about many things. In it, the disciples learn again that Jesus is the real deal, the son of God, and keeps company with Bible royalty. This text reminds us to listen to Jesus—always and closely, to listen to Jesus. This text serves to prepare us for even bigger chapters in the story—namely the betrayal, the trial, the suffering, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. (We begin the season of Lent on this Wednesday.)

This text also is a call for believers to step out of their comfort zones. Peter, James, and John are content (or simply willing to stop and stay) on this mountain of transfiguration, but they can't stay there. No, setting up camp is not appropriate. We can't stay on retreat forever. We need to follow Jesus. And that means we've got to come down from this mountaintop of Transfiguration into the shadows of the valley where Jesus has work to do, and where Jesus needs our help.

We are not meant to stay in here. We are meant to go out there. To get to work. To share the story. To live the dream. To be the church in shoes. To be the body of Christ in the world.

This work will transform us. Or, even "Transfigure" us. That word suggests a metamorphosis. That is, who we are when we start out is not who we end up as. As we journey up and down the hills of discipleship, we are worn into something more beautiful, more useful, even more spiritual and glorious. That doesn't happen standing still or camping in tents on the top of a pretty mountain with good views, even with the likes of Moses and Elijah hanging out with us. No: we've got to use it or lose it. We've got to move.

When we used to wake up our young sons for school, they'd often say, "Just give me a few more minutes." They wanted to stay in their warm beds, maybe like those disciples wanted to stay on that amazing mountain.

But they had untold adventures to step into. Our now-grown sons and those brazen, first disciples Peter, James, and John had work to do, dreams to weave, bread to break, love to make, help to lend, gifts to share.

They had to go, in Christ's name. They had to go.

And so must we.

Thank God. The one wrapped in light walks with us.

AMEN.