

Metamorphosis

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Mark 9: 2-9



2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

5 Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three

shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) 7 Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” 8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

This coming Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. As many (but not all) of you know, Lent is a 40 day period of time the church sets aside to reflect on our relationship with Jesus. It was originally set up as a time for those seeking Baptism to study and pray in anticipation of receiving Communion and the glory of Easter. It was a time of discernment and wonder that had little breaks in it as the sabbath was kept “as usual” by which I mean, that the church did not count Sundays in the 40 days, because Sunday was/is reserved for God, and we always celebrate God’s presence when we

gather for worship. We sing. We pray. We listen. We rejoice in the presence of God.

Perhaps that tradition goes back to today's text. The disciples had recently been told by Jesus that the time was coming when he would be rejected, and killed. They had heard that he would suffer and somehow rise again. It must have been very disheartening. Their hearts must have ached to know that this man who they loved was going to feel a lot of pain. It is certainly how I feel whenever I hear that someone is about to begin chemotherapy or radiation therapy. My heart aches in anticipation of their aching, their hair falling out, their burns or loss of appetite. I've seen it enough in my own family and in the lives of the congregations I serve to know that it is not an easy road. I am guessing that most of you have seen it, too. Traveling with someone who is about to experience pain is a heavy burden to bear. Sure the doctors say that at the end of treatments the cancer will be eradicated. Sure they mentioned that after a certain amount of time life will go on...but that's in the future. This is now.

Mark reminds us that even in the midst of "now" *After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.* The "after six days" refers to the sabbath. And on the sabbath Jesus took the friends who had been making this soul troubling trip, "up a high mountain, where they were all alone." It was the tradition in Jesus' day (as it is today) to step aside from our troubles on the sabbath. It is the tradition to focus our energy on God on the sabbath. It is the tradition to give thanks, and pray, and sing, and whoop it up a little in celebration of

the One who IS. We do that knowing that the stuff that “BE” that resides at the bottom of the hill will still be there when we are finished. We do this knowing that by acknowledging God’s presence in worship we remember that God is also present to us outside of worship, when we are at the clinic, or having our blood tested, or wrestling with a new wig.

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Peter, James and John get that sacred break. Something happens in the midst of their being with Jesus that excites them and confuses them and overwhelms their brains beyond the sad news of Jesus’ suffering. In the midst of worship they have a vision, a revelation that there were people of faith before Jesus who suffered. Moses wandered in the wilderness for 40 years after leading Israel out of bondage, out of slavery. He brought the faith community God’s Laws (the top 10) and watched as the people trespassed against that covenant. He never made it to the Promised Land because of a highly debated error in judgement...but God cared for him and his body nonetheless.

Elijah battled false prophets and foreign queens. He was often afraid and running for his life. He called the people to turn away from idolatry, to turn away from traditions that did not bring them life, and he was hotly rebuked for his efforts. In the end, he was whisked away in a whirlwind of power and violence that his follower (Elisha) recorded as, “God.”

Somehow in the midst of worshipping on the mountain these two greats of the past appear before the disciples, and Jesus transcends their presence and He appears before the disciples, but in a transfigured form.

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Maybe you've had those moments when in the midst of a difficult journey God becomes so present to you that it is overwhelming. The Spirit is alive with love and compassion and you know that you're not alone, you're not going to be left alone. It can short out our circuits. Sometimes I have felt tears coming down my cheeks and I don't know why...except I do know why. Because suddenly, in the midst of watching someone I love make the difficult journey toward healing I realize that they are going to be OK. I realize that the rules and expectations of our relationship in the past will not dictate what can become in the future. Jesus is shimmering in our midst and the possibilities are beyond what words can describe.

- There may be healing here on earth.
- There may be remission.
- There may be relapse.
- There will be new life as God transforms what we see into something sacred; something so embraced by love that even death cannot defile its beauty.

Peter wanted to hold onto that moment of sacred wonder. He wanted to build booths from his tradition that represented God's presence in the midst

of the people. He wanted to preserve the moment so that others could see and experience what he and the buddies had experienced...even though they truly didn't understand it. It was pretty awesome and I believe that like us, when we have a good day, a transformative moment with someone we care about, we want to reproduce it so that it never goes away. So we can always feel like this with this particular person or group of people..but God won't be held. I suppose that is why the moments when we encounter God are so amazing. They are fleeting. And even though they are fleeting they refresh us and excite us to continue thinking about those moments. God creates a metamorphosis that can sustain us when we head back down the mountain with the assurance that God is with us.

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" 8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

The disciples got a sneak peek into what would happen after the suffering ended. By recording it Mark gives us a look into how God transforms suffering into something different. Something holy. Something that we can claim victory with even though it means moving through the death of a loved one.

Dictionary.com defines *metamorphosis* as: *a profound change in form from one stage to the next in the life history of an organism.*

As we enter into this tranfiguring time of discipleship known as Lent, let us make room for the *metamorphosis* that God has in mind. Let us walk with Jesus by our side throughout the week, and then on the sabbath, take time

to gather with him on the mountain top in worship. Let's listen to Jesus in the songs the choir sings, the music Fimi plays, the prayers of the people, time at the Communion table and maybe even in the sermons that flow forth from this pulpit.

When we gather together, let us listen for the Good News God has to share with us here. May those fleeting moments sustain us through the week, through our difficult times, through the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Amen.