

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
 East Moline, Illinois  
 Pastor Becky Sherwood  
**February 22, 2009, Transfiguration Sunday**  
 Psalm 50:1-6, Mark 9:2-9  
**Coming out from the Clouds and Fog...into Lent**

**INTRO TO NEW TESTAMENT READING:**

Our New Testament Lesson this morning is Mark 9:2-9. It begins with the words "six days later." So, I'm going to begin this morning by reading from Mark 8:31-33 which tells us what happened 6 days before our reading in Mark 9. Verses 31-33 read: "Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."  
 Then we continue at 9:2:

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There are those moments in life that we want to hold onto so they won't slip away:  
 Your child's first step,  
 watching your son or daughter start their first day of school,  
 the last time you saw your parents before they died,  
 the taste of your mother's cooking,  
 the sound of your father's laugh,  
 your first sight of the ocean,  
 the night your husband proposed,  
 the night your wife said yes,  
 getting your driver's license, and the first time your parents let you drive their car alone,  
 the last family reunion when your grandparents were still alive,  
 the day your child was baptized,  
 your wedding day,  
 the night your high school won the championship,  
 holding your first grandchild,  
 your 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation, your high school or college graduation,  
 the first time you stepped onto a stage in a play,  
 the view the first time you climbed a mountain and looked to the horizon,  
 the first time your baby curled their little fingers around your finger.

If there was a way to do it, we would want to keep these and many other memories as fresh as the moment they happened.

But life doesn't work that way does it? In fact, it would be dangerous if life worked that way!  
 We would always be looking back,  
 instead of living in the present,  
 or making plans for the future.  
 If we hold too tightly to the past, living stops.

But we are people who have lived through 2020 and are now living a lot of the same in 2021.  
 Can anyone really blame us for wanting to hold onto the past, those remembered days before we

said the words “Covid19” in every other sentence we spoke, those days when we gathered at church, and with family and friends, and didn’t think anything of it?

Can anyone really blame us for being fearful of living in the present or making plans for the future, because the past year has shown us that moving forward can make life so unpredictable, and sometimes quite painful?

This week I received a meme that read: “So, Lent begins in 3 days. Are we really expected to give up anything more?”

Then I received a local church newsletter in which the pastor wrote about how he was realizing how hard it was going to be to preach in Lent this year. A colleague had told him that it was because it felt like Lent never ended last year, we never got to Easter. He agreed that some days it feels like it’s just been one long season of Lent for nearly a year.

Pastor James Benson, Good Shepherd Presbyterian Newsletter, 2/21, Rock Island

And here we are 3 days away from the beginning of Lent which begins this week on Ash Wednesday. Each year on this Sunday before Lent we return to the story of Jesus’ transfiguration which reminds us that Jesus is our Messiah, and that stopping time just doesn’t work, and change is a part of living.

But do we have the heart, or the energy, to hear that message this morning?

We, who could each write a book about what change looks like, and feels like, and demands of us?

We, who have been shaped by 2020 in ways we understand and in ways that will continue to unfold in our lives.

How do we spend time with this story of the transfiguration?

Peter learned about trying to stop time and avoid change when Jesus was transfigured before them on the mountain.

It was a life-changing experience for Peter, James and John.

It was also terrifying.

They went from spending time alone with their teacher on a mountain, to seeing him changed before their eyes.

Jesus’ robe was probably the brown of goat’s hair, or the tan of sheep’s wool; it would have been dusty from walking the roads around Galilee. But in an instant it became dazzling white. Mark finds the best way to describe this by saying that no one on earth could bleach it that white.

Then in the next moment the disciples see Jesus in all his divine glory speaking with Moses and Elijah!!! These were the heroes of their faith, but they had been dead for hundreds of years.

Here was proof beyond anything they could have imagined that Jesus was the Messiah. Here was a mystery in front of them, that both thrilled and terrified them.

As terrified as Peter was of all that was happening around him, he wanted to preserve that moment on the mountain. Of course he did! Peter said: “Jesus, it is great that we are all here, let us build three dwelling places for the three of you.

Let us provide a structure to keep this just as it is, you with Moses and Elijah.

Let’s put time on hold here on the mountain top.

Let’s turn this holy moment into something permanent.

Peter made a plan, “Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.”

Peter had a plan, a clear plan, and then found himself in the foggy cloud that covered the mountain.

After all that we have lived through this year I have a strong feeling of connection with Peter, who just wanted the world to stop, and goodness to be kept in place; safely in place.

But then a cloud descended on the mountain.

Thinking about Peter in the foggy cloud reminded me of a story I told you a few years ago about a breakfast conversation I had while on a retreat at the Sinsinawa Retreat Center up in Wisconsin. People on retreat there share the same table for mealtime, and over the course of two days I shared some amazing meal-time conversations about life and faith with a man named Loras who was a long-distance truck driver. I told him about feeling like I was in a foggy place with God at that time and I was having trouble hearing and understanding God in my own journey. I explained that I was having trouble finding my way out of the fog.

And that morning, at the Retreat Center I was talking to the perfect person, because he gave me an answer, I couldn’t have heard from anyone else in my life, because I don’t know any other long-distance truck drivers.

Loras said that you would think that there would be a lot more wrecks when its foggy out, but he said with all the thousands of miles he’d driven he’d seen more wrecks in clear weather.

He said when people get into the fog, they become more careful and they pay more attention to where they are going and what they are doing.

Then he told me, “I always think of God being with me in the foggy and cloudy times because that is when God showed up for God’s people in the Bible.

He explained:

On the Mt. of Transfiguration, it was God in the cloud saying this is my Son, the Beloved, Listen to him.

And when God was leading the Israelites through the wilderness, God come them in the cloud on Mt. Sinai and brought them the law and taught them.

And when they were traveling through the wilderness God led them with the pillar of cloud day by day. And when the Cloud came down on the Tent of Meeting the people knew God was with them.

God was always with them in the cloudy times.”

And he went on: “The cloudy and foggy times are time of trusting that God is there with you. It’s only later, when the fog and the clouds clear that you can clearly see how God was with you and guiding you in the fog and cloud.”

I continue to be thankful for those mealtime conversations with Lorus three years ago.

So thinking about what he said God in the fog and clouds has me thinking that maybe, even though it may feel like we’ve been trudging through Lent for a very long time, even before Lent begins again, we can stand with Peter in the fog and listen to the voice of our God who continues to speak to us, in the fog of 2020 and 2021, saying: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Because, dear children of God, with all that this past year has asked of us,  
with all the ways that it has changed us,

with all that we have lost,  
and with all that is uncertain as we look forward,  
God has not left us alone.

God has been showing up for God's people in the cloudy, foggy times since the time of Moses, and long before Moses, and God will continue to show up for you and for me in this present foggy, cloudy time.

So, let us walk with Peter and James and John, and with each other in the community of faith, into this season of Lent.

Let us once again walk with Jesus our Messiah on the journey to the cross, and the promised resurrection of Easter morning.

We will be guided step by step by our God who is present with us right now,  
because God is always with God's people in the clouds and in the fog,  
inviting us with ancient words that are new for us this day:  
"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"