

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Transfiguration: God prepares us for difficult tasks"

Scripture: Luke 9:28-45

Rev. Steve Filyk

February 14, 2021

Opening Hymn: 438 When morning gild the skies,

Closing Hymn: 479 The church's one foundation (1,2,4,5)

Choruses: Shine, Jesus, shine 445 Open our eyes, Lord,

Many of you know that I'm a chaplain in the army.

I the padre for the Rocky Mountain Rangers primary reserve unit
Right here in Kamloops.

Last week after we streamed our service

I headed over the regiment to check in
On some of the soldiers.

The regiment has been running a course of basic training

Over subsequent weekends.
And I went in to check in on the candidate's morale.

Most people don't understand what they are signing up for

When they join the army.

Even if a candidate has friends and family in the army

There are just some things that have to be experienced
To be understood:

Like being simultaneously

Overloaded with information
yet deprived of basic explanations...

like being tested on new skills

after you are mentally and physically exhausted.

like being confined

To a space and a schedule
That you cannot escape without being charged...

Most people who sign up for the military

Have an incomplete understanding of what they will be facing.

Despite being strong and intelligent,

Unless candidate has a clear sense of purpose,
They will struggle to succeed.

PAUSE

While few of us will ever go through basic training
 We will all face major challenges.

Those who follow Jesus
 Will face additional challenges
 As we follow his narrow path.

Sometimes we will be asked to go
 where we don't want to go
 and do what we don't want to do.

I recall someone who turned away from the life of faith
 Saying about Jesus' call, that
 "It's just too much to ask."

So what keeps you travelling with Jesus?
 What keeps you going,
 When the going gets tough?

PAUSE

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday.
 We are quickly entering into the season of Lent,
 that six-week period of repentance and reflection before Easter.

During Lent we are reminded of the difficulties Jesus
 Faced in his obedience to God.
 We are reminded how his obedience led death
 ...And resurrection.
 And we are reminded of our call to follow.

Which bring us to today's story.
 Today in our reading in Luke
 We are at a sort of hinge
 in the narrative about Jesus.

Immediately before today's lesson
 Peter confesses Jesus to be 'God's Messiah'
 And then Jesus tells the disciples
 what they can anticipate
 For him and their own lives.

Jesus tells them:

"The Son of Man must suffer many things
 and be rejected... and he must be killed
 and on the third day be raised to life."

Then he said to them all:

‘Whoever wants to be my disciple
must deny themselves and take up their cross daily
and follow me.’ⁱ

Now if you just focus on just the pain and suffering,
This prediction is pretty dismal,
Both for Jesus and his followers.

You can imagine a gloom
Settling in among the disciples.
You can imagine them all staring at the ground.

They thought that their journey with Jesus
Would only be getting better.

They thought that Jesus’ being the Messiah
Would mean comfort and power for them all.

Instead, they are promised a road that is difficult.

But God prepares us
for all the challenges we will need to face.
We see this in today’s story.

Luke tells us how Jesus leaves the main group of disciples
to go pray, but that this time
He brings along his closest friends:
Peter, James, and John.

What follows is nothing short of amazing.
Let me read you an excerpt from *The Message*:

“While he was in prayer,
the appearance of his face changed
and his clothes became blinding white.

At once two men were there talking with him.
They turned out to be Moses and Elijah—
and what a glorious appearance they made!

They talked over his exodus,
the one Jesus was about to complete in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Peter and those with him
were slumped over in sleep.

When they came to, rubbing their eyes,

they saw Jesus in his glory
and the two men standing with him.

[Peter started talking nonsense, and while he was babbling]
a light-radiant cloud enveloped them.

As they found themselves buried in the cloud,
they became deeply aware of God.

Then there was a voice out of the cloud:

“This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him.””

What a moment.

“Here God both shows up to Jesus...
and shows up in Christ Jesus

—on a mountain...

as God appeared to both Elijah (1 Kings 19)
and Moses (Exodus 33) once before.”ⁱⁱ

Not only are there echoes of God’s previous appearances—

The mountain, the clouds, the glory—
But those two singular representatives
Of the Law and Prophets
are together with them.

They are talking with Jesus about his coming departure,

His exodus,
the great plan of salvation that God
is accomplishing for the whole world.

Then to cap it all off,

Just like at Jesus’ baptism, God speaks aloud.
God affirms Jesus’ sonship,
And tells the disciples to listen to him.

What a moment.

This encounter is so amazing,
That the Jesus’ blathering disciples
Are struck silent.

They take some time to tell anyone about this.

What a moment.

What an amazing story.

And talk about timing.

Remember Jesus had just disclosed to them

The difficult road ahead of him.
 Jesus had just told the disciples
 That they would have their own cross to bear.

But into that gloom,
 God's light shines brightly.

For Jesus, the transfiguration confirm[s] who he [is]
 and assure[s] that the announced path before him
 [is] not only according to the law and the prophets
 but [is] the will of God for him.

For the apostles, the experience [tells] them
 that Jesus [is] God's Son
 and [is] to be obeyed

as he [instructs] them on the way to Jerusalem
 and to death.ⁱⁱⁱ

God is preparing both the disciples and Jesus
 For the difficult tasks that await them.

And the same God makes sure
 We have what we need for the challenges
 Before us.

Paul tells the church at Corinth that:
 No test or temptation that comes your way
 is beyond the course of what others have had to face.

All you need to remember is that God will never let you down;
 he'll never let you be pushed past your limit;
 he'll always be there to help you come through it.^{iv}

Have you experienced that provision in your own life?
 Can you see how God has equipped you
 To deal with the challenges you are now facing?

This provision may have come
 As an encouragement from a friend
 Or a word from a stranger.

This provision may be found
 In a verse or story from Scripture
 or something you dreamed about.

Can you see how God has equipped you
 To face the challenges before you?

If you can see this clearly,
Praise God.

If you cannot, ask God for the veil to be lifted
That you might be filled with new hope
Even as you face the trials that stand before you.

But don't stop following,
even if you are waiting.

Remember that call that followings today vision.
Remember that call that follows every vision.

"Listen to him."
"Listen to Jesus" God tells us.

In his commentary on this passage Stephen Farris notes:
"Mystical mountaintop experiences are doubtless wonderful and exciting...
But every Christian can, and must, hear, trust, and obey."^v

Thanks be to God.
Amen.

ⁱ Luke 9:22-23 NIV

ⁱⁱ Karl Jacobson "Commentary on Luke 9:28-45" <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/transfiguration-3/commentary-on-luke-928-45-3>

ⁱⁱⁱ Fred B. Craddock *Luke* 134

^{iv} 1 Corinthians 10:13 MSG

^v Stephen Farris "Luke 9:28-36" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 360