

Sunday, February 14th, 2021

Transfiguration Sunday

Call to Worship

Leader: God said, "Let light shine in the darkness!"

People: Lord, shine your light in our lives.

Leader: We see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

People: The light of Christ is with us day by day.

Leader: Let us follow the light of Christ together.

People: Let us worship God with thanks and praise.

Prayer of Adoration

O God, we bless you for the gift of faith. In some of us it is strong like an oak tree, rooted deeply and rising proudly. In others of us, it is fragile, like a flower, tossed in the wind, bowed by storms. In each of us faith is your gift, not our own achievement, nor something about which we can boast. It is your gift, one we are given to share with others. Thanks be to you, O God, for the mystery of faith, in our lives. Amen.

Hymn 314 God is love: come heaven adorning

Prayer of Confession

How good, O God, to be here, where your glory shines and your bright vision of justice and peace surrounds us. Be with us here in our worship and in all our days. Holy God, we confess our weakness, and our failure to live the life you offer us through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

L: Friends, hear the Good News! The gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, has dawned upon us.

P: So that we can follow in the way of Christ.

L: Friends, believe the Good News!

P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Hymn 773 Jesus bids us shine

Mission Capsule: A Meaningful Message

St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Creston, B.C., is a small remote church tucked away in

Kootenay Valley. With a grant from Presbyterian Sharing to support ministry in remote communities, they called the Rev. Stephen Vangroonen to their congregation in the hope that he would help strengthen and grow their ministry. But shortly after he and his family arrived, the COVID -19 pandemic hit, and the congregation found itself adapting quickly to move services online. Then, when churches were permitted to reopen, they had to adapt to the new health and safety protocols. Throughout it all, the Rev. Vangroonen has blessed St. Stephen's with a positive outlook, continually encouraging the new community he serves to trust God and share the love of Christ with others – a meaningful message during this turbulent time.

Readings

2 Kings 2: 1-12 Elijah is taken up into heaven

Psalm 50: 1-6 God summons the earth

2 Corinthians 4: 1-6 The light of knowledge shines in our hearts

Mark 9: 2-9 The transfiguration of Jesus

Hymn 186 Swiftly pass the clouds of glory

Sermon: Halfway between the Cradle and the Cross.

Today, we hear about that concept that comes up every year in the church, the transfiguration. We know that it takes place about half-way between Christmas and Easter, or the cradle and the cross. There's no explanation of what this event is all about. So we simply hear how Mark describes it.

Peter, James and John don't know what to do when this event takes place. Mark tells us they were terrified. Even Peter, who always seems to have something to say, here, simply says, "Rabbi," though it is clear he is something more. "It is good for us to be here." It's not a convincing response, it's almost, I don't know what else to say so I'll say this.

Then in that tradition of religious people who feel the need to capture a moment within a moment, Peter says, "Let us make three dwellings," and Mark adds he did not know what to say for he was shaking in his boots.

We have seen this picture before. Peter, James and John have been on the road with Jesus for eight chapters. They have been places and they have seen things that scared the wits out of them. Remember, just after Jesus called them they followed him to the hometown Synagogue. There he said a whole lot of amazing stuff. He even got into a shouting match with a crazy man sitting near the back, and then he cast out evil spirits from the man and everyone said: "Whoa. What's this?"

Peter, James and John were with him the day he healed a leper. They saw him touch the man that the Bible said you should never touch. The old book of Leviticus was quite clear! Don't

even get close to a leper. Make the leper yell at you as a warning so you never cross the invisible boundary. Jesus refuses to let an old rule keep him from doing the right thing, the holy thing, the just thing. He touches the leper and heals him. You know Peter, James and John were scared.

And what about that night out on the water in a fishing boat where Jesus, tired from teaching all day, suggests they sail to the other side. A great windstorm arose and the waves were continually coming over the boat. As fishers they never encountered a storm like that before. They were in distress and they saw Jesus, asleep in the stern with his head on a pillow.

They shook him awake, saying, "Teacher, do you not care we are perishing?" He awoke, and looking out over the water he said: "Be quiet! Settle down!" The wind ceased and there was a dead calm. Asking the disciples why they were afraid, Mark says they said to one another: "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Does this sound like life with Jesus is pleasing and full of fun? It really wasn't. The disciples often looked sideways at one-another, like when that boat ride was over and they landed on shore, they looked up to see a cemetery and running from the cemetery toward them was a wild man screaming. He came up to Jesus and bowed down before him and repeated the same words as the man back in the synagogue at Capernaum.

And Jesus sent the unclean spirits out of the man into a herd of pigs, and they ran into the sea. At this, the town begged Jesus to leave them. So walking with Jesus or sailing with Jesus wasn't a walk in the park. A woman who had been bleeding for years touched Jesus and she was made well. He then took Peter, James and John into the bedroom of a little dead girl, and after Jesus spoke, the girl got up. Mark says they were overcome with amazement.

If all of this is not frightening enough, Jesus now starts talking about the cross. It's inevitable. God sends Jesus into a broken, self-destructive world. He shows God's loving mercy by fixing what he can but there's so much evil in the world, and it hits back and resists. Evil will conspire to kill Jesus in order to stop him. Jesus says it is going to happen.

If we confront evil it will talk back. If you feed the hungry, the tyrants will try to starve you. If you raise the dead the Zombies will attack you. There will be a cross for anybody who does the life-giving work of God in a world like this.

Jesus tells the disciples what the world will be doing to him, in no uncertain terms. Then, six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain. As they catch their breath from the climb, Jesus suddenly changes and he begins to shine like the sun. After just talking about death he is now fully alive, and not only him but Moses the lawgiver is alive and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets is also alive, and the three of them converse.

Mark does not separate this moment from what came before this or what comes after, There is no side stepping the cross. Jesus will be beaten and humiliated, suffer and die. Some refer to Mark's gospel, "**As the Passion story of Jesus' death with a long introduction.**"

Yet on the mountain there is a moment where there is power beyond all we know, where there is light beyond the deepest darkness.

It would seem this is Mark's way of saying there is more holiness here than we ever realized, and it's close at hand. In telling this story Mark gives it the stamp of time, "six days later." Meaning suffering isn't all there is. There's something more beyond it, through it, in spite of it.

Why does God appear on high mountains or in barren deserts or other fierce landscapes? Perhaps in extreme locals like that there are no other distractions. You see clearly what you don't see at easier locations. Isn't that when we need God most, when the going gets really tough?

The God in the transfiguration story is the God who is present all the time, in power and in glory, even if it mostly seems that God has blended in and remains out of sight. Sometimes the veil drops and we see the truth, even if we don't quite have the words to describe it.

Even before he moves toward the cross Jesus reveals the life-giving power of God. In seeing it we are encouraged to follow Jesus wherever he goes, to serve wherever he serves, and to love all those he loves. Amen.

Prayers of the People

O God of life and God of love we thank you for creating us in relationship with each other – in families and communities, neighborhoods and countries, cultures and nations. Help us contribute what we can to sustain community and share with one another.

God of our faith and our future, we face many, many pressures today. Some are struggling with economic difficulty and others with serious health issues. May your grace be with parents and children and all partners who face difficulties.

God of mercy, you call us to live together in peace and unity. We pray for our neighborhood and our country. Where people are divided and bitterness turns into resentment, show us how to work for reconciliation. As the pandemic stretches on, we pray for all those whose skill and dedication is needed to support our common life. Help us when we can to offer words of encouragement and appreciation so others know how much they matter.

We pray for our church and pray for those who need your attention today. Guide us all with your wisdom and insight so we find ways to reach out to each other in support and friendship. Open our eyes to opportunities to reach out

beyond our own fellowship as agents of your healing and hope, for we offer ourselves to you in Jesus' name in the words he taught us to pray...the Lord's Prayer

Hymn 371 Love divine, all loves excelling

Commissioning/Benediction

Jesus says we are the light of the world and he bids us shine. Now may the grace of God who made the light, the love of Christ, who is the true light come into the world, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whose light shines within us, be with us now and always. Amen