

## SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

I really understand where Peter is coming from. At times I want to criticize Peter; sometimes I want to laugh at his shortcomings; but very often it's really easy to put myself in his shoes – especially when he simply doesn't get it.

In this particular gospel reading, Peter seems to run through all the emotions trying to figure just what is happening as he stands on the mountain with Jesus...and a couple of ghosts...or whatever they are.

He (and the other disciples) start out sleepy. Let's be honest, we've all been there. Maybe right now you're feeling the weight of your eyelids. Maybe if I can carefully regulate my tone a bit, I can even help some of you get the rest you maybe missed out on last night for whatever reason. The truth is, we don't know why the disciples are sleepy. We don't know if this was an evening trip up a tall mountain, so they're just physically worn out. Maybe, like me sometimes, feeling overwhelmed feels a lot like the need to take a nap.

Maybe, also like me, they were practicing “centering prayer” which sometimes feels a lot like meditation, which also sometimes feels a lot like just drifting off into dreamland instead of actively praying. I guess that can be praying too, but sometimes it's hard to tell the difference.

No matter the source of their sleepiness, they almost missed it. But because they were still awake, in the midst of their praying, they saw Jesus transformed in front of them. They saw his clothes flash like lightning, and his face changed. I struggle with this description because it's really hard to nail down exactly what happened.

What does it mean that his clothes became brilliantly white? And what does it mean to say his “face changed”? The Greek word used here is “heteron” which means “other” or “another” – so it really just means that his face became...othered; different; not like it was.

Whatever that looked like to Peter, and James and John, they were there. They were in this holy moment with Jesus somehow transfigured and the appearance of the pillars of their tradition in Moses and Elijah. Peter goes from being sleepy to being caught up in the moment – so caught up that he wants to hold onto it. Maybe you've been there too.

I remember some really amazing holy moments that I just wanted to hold onto. Just like Peter and his attempt to build a shrine to the moment – a shrine where they could stay in that moment and just **be**. A lot of my mountaintop holy experiences happened at Camp Nawakwa – very often at Upper Temple, a worship space that was literally the top of a hill looking out over the valley. It's very easy to remember being in that special place and feel what I think Peter was feeling when he wanted to just stay there, put up a tent, and dwell in the holy.

But then terror comes. Before Peter even has a chance to finish his thought, the strange happenings of that mountain continue as they are enveloped by a cloud and a voice comes out of nowhere to speak directly to them.

I don't know about you, but I think that's where I'd be done. At this point, I've seen my teacher and friend change in indescribable ways. I've seen a couple of ghosts show up; and now a disembodied voice is speaking out of the water vapor, and I think that's just a bit too much of the supernatural for me. I'm not sure I'd know how to handle that much holy all at once.

Ready or not, overwhelmed or not, Peter, John, and James are there as the revelation of the holy continues. The voice – echoing words that were spoken at his baptism – proclaims that Jesus is God's Son, God's Chosen, more than just a teacher, more than just a prophet, more than just a man. He was, in fact, the Son of God. And the disciples are commanded to "listen to him."

Don't you wonder what Jesus said next? Imagine the cloud lifting, the voice going silent, the ghosts are gone, and you have four men looking at each other – one the subject of such a holy proclamation, and the three others maybe wondering what the heck any of that meant. Perhaps doubting their sanity just a little bit. Was it a dream? Did we all just experience a shared hallucination. It might be the biggest pregnant pause in all of scripture. "Listen to him..." But he doesn't say anything.

They head back down the mountain, according to Luke, and get right back to the work of healing. It feels a little bit like that scene in Forrest Gump after he's been running back and forth across the country, these people have been following him for whatever reason, and he suddenly slows to a stop and turns around. They're all ready for some profound words from this man they've been following, standing there out of breath from running and with anticipation and he says...nothing. Well, he says very little, "I'm pretty tired. Think I'll go home now." And returns to what he had been doing before.

Listen to him...but he doesn't say anything in that moment. That's the end of this part of the story.

Maybe it's the rest of the story that we're supposed to listen to - what he had said "about eight days" before they went up that mountain. Listen to him when he told the disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Listen to him when he said, "the Son of Man," God's chosen was going to be rejected, killed on the cross, and raised again.

Listen to him while he takes them back down from the mountain to meet those in need. Listen to him as he tells stories of abundant grace and forgiveness. Listen to him as he denies the tempter's power in the desert. Listen to him as the journey continues – a

journey that leads directly to the cross, grave, and resurrection.

It's really easy to get stuck on the mountain waiting for God to continue to show up there and keep talking – whatever God's voice might look like for you in that moment. I can name a few times in my life when I really just wanted to stay where it felt warm and cozy...just me and God. But we can't miss the journey back off the mountain to where God has told us over and over again to be...looking for the face of God, the face of Christ in those we encounter in the valley.

As I hear these words this year, amid the struggles of today, I keep thinking about the transfigured face of Christ – the one revealed on the mountain to Peter, John, and James – the face that becomes **othered**. Maybe we're not on a mountain at the moment, but maybe, just maybe, we can see the face in the one who looks different than us. Maybe in the face of the "other" we see Jesus our Lord.

When we see that face, maybe we'll realize we stand in the presence of the transfigured Jesus, in the presence of the cross, in the presence of God. Amen.