

SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

Transfiguration is a conceptually challenging festival. We're here in the doldrums of winter; the snow won't go away...it just gets dirtier. The cold won't go away...it just gets windier. We're heading into the season of Lent, which leads us toward the cross in hope but isn't known for being festive. And stuck here at the end of the season after Epiphany is one last revelation of Jesus before we start bouncing around the timeline for thematic reasons.

There is certainly some logic to the flow of these winter weeks. We celebrated the birth and baptism and then we have these experiences that reveal something about who Jesus is, which culminates on a mountain where God speaks, echoing almost word for word what had been said as Jesus stood in the waters of the Jordan after he had been baptized.

"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" The proclamation at the Jordan is a bit ambiguous. The specific audience isn't clearly identified. But here, on the mountaintop, surround by the bright cloud of God, and in the presence of the ancestors of their faith, the audience is clear. The disciples are being told **exactly** who Jesus is and what they are supposed to do. "This is my Son, the Beloved...listen to him!"

These disciples, six days earlier, had just had an argument among themselves and with Jesus about exactly what was going on. Jesus challenged them to say who he was and when they got the right answer: "the Messiah," they promptly balked at the declaration by Jesus of what it meant to **be** the Messiah. So they climb a mountain.

I've previously talked a bit about my deep adoration for Camp Nawakwa for what it has meant in my life and in the life of my family. For those who don't know or don't remember: Nawakwa is the Lutheran camp north of Gettysburg at which I spent a week of my summer every year as a kid, then 4 summers as a staff-member in college, then got married there, then several years as a family camper, staff parent, and volunteer. To say it is an important place for me would be a gross understatement.

Part of the Frigm family lore is what it felt like to turn down Nawakwa Road and spot the red backstop with "Camp Nawakwa" painted in big white letters. Laurel and I fondly remember the year that the kids were...not getting along so well in the back seat until the moment Camp was in view, and then all was right with the world. It is our mountaintop...even though it's centered in a valley.

It has been a little while now since I've had the opportunity to breathe in that pine-

scented air and walk those wood-chipped paths. But it's never far from my heart. It's never far from my mind as I consider how I have experienced God in my life. That's where the most significant moments happened. That's where my own transformation from church-goer to disciple began.

That's something to keep in mind as you hear this story of the mountaintop experience for Peter, James, and John. Yes, it is Jesus who is "transfigured" – whose appearance is changed as a revelation of God's light shining through him. But they weren't there to just **witness** a holy conversation between the Messiah they had proclaimed and the manifestation of the covenant in Moses and Elijah.

The disciples were there to be transfigured themselves – to be transformed by their experience of God so that they could be the disciples God was calling them to be. That's where God's declaration comes in. It's not just a revelation of who God is in Christ, it's marching orders for the disciples who are there to witness it. "Listen to him."

I've previously given Peter a fair amount of grief for being clueless and wanting to build a dwelling on that mountain. And other Gospel writers are bit more critical of him. Here, in Matthew's telling, Peter's suggestion of dwelling of the mountain is simply a faithful response to what he sees happening. Jesus, the Messiah, is there. Elijah and Moses are there. Let's just build a tent – a tabernacle, the dwelling place for God – and simply enjoy one another's company.

But God compels us to come back off the mountain and back into the valley. In Matthew's narrative, it's back to work, healing and teaching, moving ever closer to Jerusalem and the cross. For us, it's off the mountain into the season of Lent and the story of the wilderness.

We'll gather this week to mark a cross on our forehead, echoing the claim of our own baptism in which we became God's beloved; reminding ourselves that we are mortal and yet forever loved by this Messiah. We do that as we continue to listen to **this** Messiah – the one who revealed God's light on the mountaintop.

Last week we were reminded we are the light of the world. This week, we are reminded that that light is a reflection of God's light. Moses climbed a mountain to experience God and came back down to reflect that light to the world. We come back down from the mountaintop because the world needs us to. The world needs to see God's light reflected in our transfigured lives.

What I've had to learn over the years is how Nawakwa has formed me for life away

from Nawakwa. Yes, it's the place I want to go to because it feels as holy as any other place I've been – much more than most. But it is the experience there that forms me to live here. To live off the mountain for the sake of the world.

We gather for worship in much the same way. No matter how long your relationship has been with this particular place – whether you remember the old sanctuary or not, whether you've been here for years or just a couple of times, whether you are a voting member or not – the revelation of God in this place forms us for our work in the world. We don't get to stay here.

But that's also the good news. Because when we leave this place, we have been formed to be light for the world and the world is transformed by what we do. The "Son of Man" has been raised from the dead so the world gets to hear the news that God's love has transfigured the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.