

Not When You're Ready Does God Come—Transfiguration of Our Lord

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[Exodus 34:29-35](#)

[2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2](#)

[Luke 9:28-36 \[37-43a\]](#)

Sermon delivered at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hamden, CT

This Sunday is a hinge Sunday. As we today celebrate the power and the glory of Christ that was revealed to the disciples Peter, John and James, we also now look forward to Lent, to Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, and his rejection and death.

It's been a heavy few weeks for us in our congregation. We have been accompanying many of our siblings here as they experience loss and grief. As citizens of our nation, we've been looking to Texas and we fear for the lives and safety of Trans children and their parents. And as members of the global community, we watched on as open war has broken out in Europe for the first time since World War II.

In the midst of such heaviness, I think it can seem more than hard to celebrate the glory of Christ on this transfiguration Sunday, this metamorphosis Sunday. But there will always be difficulties and hardships. There is no perfect time, to settle in with our movie popcorn, to watch in comfortable awe as the glory of God comes upon us. That doesn't really seem to be how it works.

The disciples certainly weren't prepared. Despite the amazing things happening, you might have noticed Luke wrote, that they are weighed down with sleep (maybe from the tough hike up the mountain). They do manage to stay awake, and Peter, yawning maybe, rambles to Jesus, trying to make himself look busy: "let me make some dwellings for you all." He missed the point, he wasn't ready. Jesus is discussing his departure, his death and resurrection, with Elijah and Moses, not his plans to stay put.

Speaking of Moses, the Hebrew people with Moses aren't really prepared either for God's glory. Liberated from Egypt, God comes to them, God comes and gives to Moses a precious way to live, the law that will show forth God's justice to all the world, but they are taken aback by Moses' face that retains some of God's glory. They do not want to come near.

No, Scripture is clear, there is no perfect time for God's glory, for God's awesome-ness to come to us, for what we would call today a religious experience, or a spiritual awakening. It certainly happens, but not when we want it to. That's the thing about transfiguration, about metamorphosis—it requires unexpected changes!

Paul, in another letter to the Church in Corinth, has a creative take on this image of the veil from the story of Moses and the people. Moses puts on the veil to protect the people from fear and panic. But Paul says, the veil is more a metaphor. The veil, according to Paul, is the way religious people have a tendency to block God from their sight. The very God they love and worship, they don't actually want around.

Paul is talking about first century Judeans, about Pharisees, because that's his experience, that's what he was before God picked him up and sent him on a different path. But Paul is truly talking about all religious people, all the time. He's talking about Lutherans. He's saying our minds get blocked. When we hear the reading of the Bible, and live in the coziness of our traditions, that same blockage is still there. Our faith becomes just a lot of words and noise, stories and rules—the power and the truth of the matter, the dazzlingly bright glory of Christ on the mountain, doesn't really come through. And that is our challenge today, our dilemma, our blockage.

Maybe you, too, like the people at Mount Sinai, or the disciples on the mountain with Jesus, want the awesomeness, the glory of God in your life... But you want it at the right time, when you're ready, and when your schedule has an opening. And maybe—like the people we've heard of in the Bible today—you definitely don't want this glory to be scary, uncomfortable, or cause change.

But, there again, Scripture has a word to speak. It comes. God's glory and awesomeness comes, **but not when you're ready**. Not when peace comes at last, not when all the nations are rest, not when your congregation is doing fine. God's glory comes in the struggle, in the grief, in the cloud of messiness. God's glory has come to *this place*, this merged placed, *because* of all the messiness we are engaged in, because God's Holy Spirit has shaken us all up and removed our veils.

I'm sure you noticed a very important second half of this Transfiguration story in Luke's Gospel: the boy with the unclean spirit. Here, again, the disciples fall short. On the mountain they sleep, in the valley they fail. And Jesus shows them where God's greatness truly is revealed. Jesus comes down from the mountain, and sets his face toward Jerusalem. And on the way, Jesus rebukes this unclean spirit, Luke writes, heals the boy, and gives him back to his father. God's greatness is on the way, in the doing, **without warning**—And then, *all*, Luke writes—not just 3 sleepy disciples—*all* were astounded at the greatness of God.

And the same remains true. As we shift our focus soon towards the season of Lent, and as the world remains stubbornly broken... now is as good a time as ever for us to let go of needing everything to be neat and tidy. Now is the season to rest in the confidence that God's glorious love will come, and certainly not when we expect it.

Amen.