

## (Transfiguration of the Lord)

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Matthew 16:13-17:9

**“As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’”**

There are two things worth mentioning to you this morning.

The first is, today, March 3, marks the 170th anniversary of the founding of Oakland-Presbyterian Church! 170 years! Wow!

The second is that Tuesday, March 5, is Staci's and my twenty-fifth wedding anniversary! 25 years! That is hard for me to believe too!

We were married at Northminster Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. Like other couples, we made our vows, promising to love each other “in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, throughout all our days.”

And we have, like most couples and families, had our ups and downs.

It might be safe to say that over the past 170 years, Oakland-Cambridge has also experienced its fair share of “ups and downs” as a church.

“Ups and downs” are a part of every life. No one can be in a relationship without experiencing some form of them. One minute you seem to be riding high on top of the mountain and the next it feels like you are down in the darkest valley.

The “ups and downs” of life can make our love for another can make our love stronger. When you have suffered together, laughed together, struggled together, celebrated with one another, cried together in moments of great sorrow and danced joyfully together celebrating, held on to each other through the darkness moments, and wake to find your selves bathed in the light of a new day, finding your way forward together, you also discover a deeper, richer love.

The same is true of our faith as followers of Christ. Just ask Peter. One minute he is riding high, having just responded correctly to Jesus' question: **“Who do you say that I am?”** with these words: **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”** The next minute he gets knocked off that pedestal or in Peter's case, “Rock”, when Jesus rebukes him, saying: **“Get behind me, Satan!”** after Peter pulled him aside to challenge Jesus' words about his suffering and pending death.

And just in case the other disciples were feeling a bit too up after Peter got knocked down, Jesus turns to those following him, and says: **“If anyone wants to be my follower, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?”**

As I said, following Jesus has its “ups and downs”. But Jesus doesn't leave them “down,” he takes them “up”.

As we transition into the next segment of our story, six days have passed. Jesus heads up, as you might guess in Matthew, a mountain, taking with him Peter, James and John.

And up on the mountain top, an even more spectacular thing happens, one that is hard to explain. Jesus is “transfigured” being joined by Moses and the prophet, Elijah!

Talk about one of the highlights of following Jesus! These three are said by some scholars to represent the high points of Israel’s faith, Moses representing the “Law” and Elijah the “Prophets”. Both Moses and Elijah stories end up on top of mountains. Other scholars believe these two represent the “eschatological” moment or pinnacle of the faith journey! Up!

And if you are having this once in a lifetime faith experience, why wouldn’t you want to stay up there! Peter, James and John did. Hey Jesus, let’s build some shelters and stay here!

I don’t know about you, but I am all with Peter, terrified as he was about what he was experiencing, let’s pitch some tents and stay up here, on top of the mountain, swallowed up in the glorious, mystery of God.

We could build a fire and listen to these two legends of faith, swap stories with Jesus. How cool would that be?

Unfortunately, the transfiguration story is really not about the climb up. As Biblical Scholar, David Loss, says: **“...this isn’t a story about our going up, it’s a story about Jesus coming down, all the way down into our brokenness, fear, disappointment, and loss.”**

And damn him for going down that mountain. Because if he goes down, we as his followers must follow him down too!

And when he goes down he is not high tailing it out of Dodge. No, Jesus is heading right into the pain, suffering, and even death of the world.

Why couldn’t Jesus have just stayed up on that mountain, in that God-filled, sacred places, places filled with mystery, the we can’t explain, but we know it is filled with something holy, and where, like Peter, we want to build some shelter and stay.

And so Jesus, instead of staying up where we all want him to remain, comes down the mountain and back into every day life of the people and the world around them, knowing that suffering, pain and death is before him, even as it surrounds us and fills our world, breaking our hearts, paralyzing us with fear, leaving us to weep, uncertain of how to respond.

It’s not the first time we have gone up this mountain, only to come back down. Liturgically, we do it every year, just before Lent. Ash Wednesday is this Wednesday. We will take a moment to remind ourselves in liturgy, prayer, and by the imposition of ashes, that we are mere mortals, dust, as we say, and to dust we will return.

But until that time, when we understand the mystery of it all, we journey back down the mountain, out these doors, and back out into the broken, pain-filled world of violence, injustice, poverty, hunger, suffering and sorrow, violence where death reminds us of our limits.

Yet, even as overwhelming as life can be, it is those sacred “up and down” moments that hold us, strengthen us, encourage us, give us the ability to leave the “up” of the mountain top, and walk “down” and out again into our daily lives, not alone, but together, and together in God.

Into the Pain of It All

Shall I build some safe shelter  
up here  
nearer to God for  
Moses,  
Elijah  
and you?

Let's stay up here,  
enjoying the view of  
Heaven and you.

These holy moments are fleeting  
Here among the clouds and stars

Stay, Abide, Reside, among us, no  
Of course not.

Down, down, down, we go.  
Into what?  
Political division  
Pain,  
Broken lives,

Disease, Illness, Death, In  
hospitals  
and hospices,  
In War torn countries  
And shattered lives and communities,

Suffering and Death awaits us, yes,  
But one question, Lord, before we go?  
What about this rising thing?