

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church  
955 Main Street  
PO Box 222 (mailing address)  
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504  
Worship for February 14, 2021

**Prelude**

**Call to Worship**     O Lord, As You Were On Your Way     Carolyn Winfrey Gillette  
O Lord, as you were on your way to where you'd one day die,  
you wanted time to rest and pray, to hear God's word to you that day.  
So soon, the three became aware of such a wondrous sight.  
Your face shone bright beyond compare, just like a glimpse of heaven there!  
Your clothes were dazzling white; your glory came to light.

**Hymn**

**Spirit, Open My Heart**

**Text: Ruth Duck**

**Music: Irish Melody**

*Refrain.*

Spirit, open my heart to the joy and pain of living.  
As you love, may I love, in receiving and in giving.  
Spirit, open my heart.

God, replace my stony heart with a heart that's kind and tender.  
All my coldness and fear to your grace I now surrender. *Refrain.*

Write your love upon my heart as my law, my goal, my story.  
In each thought, word, and deed, may my living bring you glory. *Refrain.*

May I weep with those who weep, share the joy of sister, brother.  
In the welcome of Christ, may we welcome one another. *Refrain.*

**Prayer of Confession**

God of compassion,  
in Jesus Christ you reveal the light of your glory.  
But we turn away, distracted by our own plans.  
We confess that we speak when we should listen,  
and act when we should wait.  
Forgive our aimless enthusiasms.  
Grant us wisdom to live in your light  
and to follow in the way of your beloved Son,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **Assurance of Forgiveness**

Though we were blinded by sin,  
God's saving light has been beamed into our hearts  
that we may see the radiant mercy of God  
in the face of Jesus Christ.  
Sisters and brothers, your sins are forgiven. Be at peace. Amen.

The Gospel Reading      **Mark 9:2-10**

## **The Transfiguration**

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' <sup>6</sup>He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' <sup>8</sup>Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

## **The Coming of Elijah**

9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup>So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

**The Morning Message**    Sermon for Feb. 14, 2021    Transfiguration Sunday

We were headed to Boston for spring break. Ed and I and about forty high school choir students and assorted parents. But it's a long way from Ona, West Virginia to the place where everybody knows your name.

So, we stopped for the night right outside New York City, enjoyed a great Italian meal, and turned in. The next day we would go into the city, though it was raining buckets, where we would pay our respects at the 9/11 Memorial and ascend the 102 stories to the Observation Tower of One World Trade, enjoying the Big Apple's skyline from the tallest building in the western hemisphere.

Truth be told, I would have preferred staying on the ground, at the 9/11 Memorial. There was something gravid and mysterious about that place where so many lost their lives that tragic September day. A few moments felt too short a time to acknowledge the depth of pain and suffering.

But, I joined the others and up we went, by elevator and stairs, finally reaching the first observation deck. The enthusiastic tour guides had us all anticipating the big reveal. You see, when you get to the observation deck, there are ceiling to floor windows, like Windows on the World, the famous restaurant that once topped the World Trade Center. Shades cover the windows to add to the suspense. At the moment of greatest suspense, the shades rose slowly to reveal...

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. We were shrouded in fog so dense you could see nothing of the great throbbing city below. No Statue of Liberty beckoning to the tired and poor, no Empire State Building or Rockefeller Center or St. Patrick's Cathedral. We knew they were there. We had seen some of them from the busy Manhattan streets.

But, in that moment, all we could see was a solid white wall of fog. We were so high up, it was like being enveloped in a cloud. And being in a cloud is disorienting.

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray. But, once the cloud descends, they find themselves terrified and confused. The dazzling white of Jesus' clothes no longer shines so brightly. Moses and Elijah, the pillars of the law and the prophets, there just moments ago, vanish. Being in the cloud, lost in the fog, disorients. No longer weighed down with sleep, their senses grow more acute. What would happen next?

And then came the voice, adding to their terror. "Look. This is my Son, my chosen, listen to him." God was closer than Peter, James, and John ever expected. Present, yet invisible.

The story of the transfiguration is very odd, isn't it? I'm not sure what to do with clothes that glow or the appearance of long-dead heroes, or hearing a booming voice from heaven. I'm even less sure how to make sense of it for a congregation who has assembled to worship and to find inspiration for the coming week.

But, I do know about prayer. And, I do know about going away to a beautiful or far-off secluded place in search of solace or direction or a sense of the Holy One. I know the importance of gathering a few friends around me so I won't have to face my terrors alone. I know about being dead-dog tired but my feverish, fretful child needs to be in the comfort of my arms. I do know what it's like to be in a fog, literally and figuratively, trying to find my way home.

And I know about mountain-top experiences. Moments so distinctive that we will never forget them. Moments of clarity or beauty or profound community that serve as the signposts of our lives. For those of us who are in a community of faith, those mountain-top experiences are almost certain to have a spiritual perspective.

This is why we had pancakes after church about a year ago. By the way, Teague True re-named them, “Kuhn Cakes,” and that’s how they will forever be known. We had a fund-raising brunch to help the children and youth of this church have those mountain-top experiences. Literally. Bluestone Camp and Conference Center is in Hinton, West Virginia. It is the site of the presbytery’s summer camping program. It is a place set apart- for fun and recreation, for swimming and canoeing, for hiking in the woods, singing around a campfire. All un-plugged. No electronics. It is a place of prayer, and study, and lighting the sparks of faith. It is a place of the beloved community. And endless games of ping pong.

Montreat is a Presbyterian conference Center, a college and a town in Western North Carolina. Close to Asheville. The first time I visited Montreat, our driver pulled into the parking lot and said, “You all are from almost heaven. This here...is heaven!” And he was right.

When not under Covid restrictions, Presbyterian youth from all over the country make the journey to Montreat for one of several weeks of summer youth conferences. You haven’t lived until you see a thousand teen-agers gathered around the entrance to Anderson Auditorium, ready to rush the place...to worship God.

Daily worship with outstanding leaders, one of which was to be Cliff Haddox last year, small groups to explore the scriptures and ideas they prompt, recreation, music, all kinds of special interest opportunities. Rock-hopping. Meeting people. Making life-long friends.

Back in the day, you could see Montreat’s most famous residents, Ruth and Billy Graham, driving around in their beat up old Volvo wagon with a dog of two hanging their heads out the windows.

Surveys show that the single most important factor in a young person choosing to attend theological seminary is attendance at summer camp or conference. It is formative. To be in a place set-apart, with distractions reduced to a minimum, immersed in the faith, with sufficient time for rest and recreation, provides space to ponder the deeper concerns of life, establish priorities, make decisions, solve problems.

When Jesus took his friends up Mt. Horeb, he was coming to the end of his earthly ministry, but he had not yet completed his work. His greatest work, his magnum opus, was yet to come. Did he ascend the mountain to inquire of God about his next steps? To gather courage? To pass the torch of ministry to Peter, James, and John?

We don’t know. It was quite clear that Peter wanted to stay on the mountain. He was already talking about building booths for Moses, Elijah and Jesus, as if he could contain them there and be enshrined in their glory. He was reluctant to return to the ordinary and common things of life.

This is normal. I can certainly relate. For many years, I took groups of young people to Montreat. We stayed in a stinky old un-air-conditioned house on Mississippi Road every year. The raccoons and the bears took turns turning over our trash cans and scattering the contents. A dozen kids in one house for a week is a challenge. But, it was also a little slice of heaven. It was hard to head home, to pick up on the regular routine, to feel the absence of one another.

We don't know exactly why Jesus took his friends up Mt. Horeb that day. But, when they came back down the mountain, Jesus had his face set toward Jerusalem. Toward the demands of his passion. And the glory of his resurrection.

A.H. McNeile once wrote, "The Mountain of Transfiguration is always more enjoyable than the daily ministry or the way of the cross." But it is given to us to strengthen us for our daily tasks and to enable us to walk the way of the cross.

Susanna Wesley had a prayer that went like this:

"Help me, Lord, to remember, that religion is not to be confined to the church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in Thy presence."

Even here, in our living room. Even in yours.

### **Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer**

O Lord, our God,

you are great indeed, clothed in majesty and splendor,  
wrapped in light as with a robe.

In the solitude of a mountain height,  
you revealed your glory in Jesus Christ  
even as he faced his crucifixion.

We praise you for this glimpse of the mystery of our redemption.

Transfigure us by your Spirit,  
and let your love shine in all we do and say  
that all the world may see the radiance of your light,  
Christ Jesus, your Son,

Who guides all creation to the fullness of your glory.

We lift up those in our community of faith, our friends, and family members who are in need of healing and wholeness, all those in need, the forgotten, lost, and abused,  
and pray for the coming of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray as Jesus taught us, saying, Our Father...Amen.

**Blessing**

Nathan Nettleton, Laughingbird.net

Go now, and speak of what you have seen of God.

Do not cling to the holy moments when heaven overshadows you.

But, as the Lord lives, listen to Christ and follow him from the places of revelation to the places of mission.

And may God shine the light of glory into your hearts.

May Christ be with you and never leave you.

And may the Spirit renew the image of God within you.

**Postlude**