

February 25, 2024  
Second Sunday in Lent

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Lenten Reading Psalm 22: 23-31 Jon and Caroline True

Reader 1: Friends, once again we invite you to observe a holy Lent, that by practicing the spiritual disciplines, you may draw closer to Christ the Savior and your life may more closely follow his.

Reader 2: Hear these words from the psalmist:

All you who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

For he did not despise or abhor the affliction or the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Reader1: Please join me in prayer.

Look with favor, Lord, upon your household. Grant that, though our flesh may be humbled by setting aside human comforts and appetites, our souls, hungering after you, may be resplendent in your sight. Amen.

\*Hymn 450 Be Thou My Vision

Prayer of Confession

**Holy and merciful God, in your presence we confess our failure to be what you created us to be.**

**You alone know how often we have sinned in wandering from your ways, in wasting your gifts, in forgetting your love.**

**By your loving mercy, help us live in your light and abide in your ways, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ,  
we are forgiven. Amen.

Old Testament Reading                      Genesis 17: 1-7; 15-16

Moments With Our Young Disciples

New Testament Reading                      Mark 9:2-10

Morning Message

If you are a teacher of the fine arts, taking your students on a trip to New York City is probably at the top of your to-do list. Ed has taken his students about every three or four years and I have benefitted from those trips.

Theatres, the Met, museums, and much more are like magnets, drawing young people, and those who accompany them, into the magnificent buildings and performance settings. Just don't try to take a picture while you are inside those exquisite places. A security guard may just ask you to hand over your phone until you leave. My sister, who memorializes everything, was caught trying to snap a quick pic of her son during intermission at the Metropolitan Opera. It can be pretty intimidating.

And, advised both the travel guide and the bus driver in the early years after the 9/11 disasters, when you go by the site of the Twin Towers, the bus will stop and you may take a photo, but, it is considered very bad manners to take a picture of yourself or anyone else standing by Ground Zero with a smile on the face. We can understand why.

You can take pictures of a million other things, including the new One World Trade, which we visited the last time we were there with students. It was a miserable day. Rain was pouring buckets and the wind was whipping. We would pay our respects at the 9/11 Memorial Fountain

before ascending the 102 stories to the Observation Tower, 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 is 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. Water runs over the surface of the granite walls bearing the names of the dead, like so many tears coursing down the cheeks.

But, I joined the others and up we went, by elevator and stairs, finally reaching the first observation deck. The enthusiastic tour guides pumped us all up for 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.

The transfiguration of Jesus is a beautiful and mysterious story found in all three of the synoptic gospels. It is a theophany- an appearance of the holy. A visual manifestation of God.

Jesus has taken his closest disciples-Peter, James, and John, the brother of Jesus, up Mt. Horeb for some time set apart, to pray, to think about this ministry God has called them to, to be strengthened for the days ahead.

The transfiguration not only supports the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. But the statement, "Listen to him," identifies Jesus as the messenger and voice of God. The significance of this identity is affirmed by the presence of Moses, the law-giver, and Elijah, the great prophet.

What a moment for Peter, James, and John. Not just to see, but fully experience Jesus in all his glory. And yet, they were terrified. Scripture says so. So terrified that they could do nothing else but fall face down on the ground and worship God.

The disciples didn't anticipate this event. But, they were in the company of Jesus, and when they were with Jesus, all kinds of unusual things could happen. They had witnessed his compelling preaching and teaching. They had seen him perform miracles. They knew deep down in their hearts that Jesus was of God.

And still...they were afraid. Is there any other way to respond? How do you explain what happened? Who would believe you anyway?

That's a good question for us. Has Jesus come to you in some transcendent way? Maybe he has spoken to you, or appeared in a dream, or comforted you in a time of trouble. How did it make you feel? Did you tell anyone? Why? Why not?

Tova Sido, is a minister in the United Methodist Church. She shares this story:

She says, "When I was a child the only thing I ever wanted to be was a mom. So, in the year 2000, when I became pregnant, I was ecstatic. This was the beginning of all my dreams coming true. Over the next five years, my husband and I experienced unspeakable tragedy. We lost our first pregnancy at nine months with the birth of our stillborn daughter. The next pregnancy ended in a miscarriage. Our third pregnancy, I finally gave birth to the most beautiful boy the world has ever known, Charlie. However, I lost Charlie just eight short months later. I also lost his baby sister, Louisa, after eight months, in the summer of 2005. They were born with a rare metabolic disease- untreatable, incurable.

The summer of 2005 proved to be the darkest of Tova's life. She was suicidal. She felt like she had no purpose, no joy, and no hope for a future without children. Her dreams of becoming a mom had only ended in heartbreak. She was deeply depressed and very afraid.

This season of tragedy made it very difficult to trust that life was worth living. I want to pause here a moment and acknowledge the reality of that pain. Most of us hope to be parents one day. To take our place in the eternal circle of life. But, when parenthood doesn't come, or you have experienced reproductive trauma after trauma, it can become the thing that defines you. The loss is magnified until you can see or appreciate nothing else.

Tova says was not a particularly spiritual or religious person at the time. But something within her told Tova that the only way out of this was something much bigger than she.

She made an appointment with her pastor. On a hot summer day, Tova sat down with him, describing how sad, lonely, and depressed she was. She told of all the losses she and her husband had suffered. She cried what she called an ocean of tears.

When she quieted down, her pastor looked at her, and after a long pause, gently asked, "Are you done?"

Now, that would have made me cry even more. Didn't he hear me? Could he not at least sympathize with my pain and grief? If I were Tova, I probably would have left never to return.

But, that's not what happened. Tova's pastor asked her, "What are you going to do now?"

She replied that she had no idea and that was why she was there. She needed help sorting that out. She had great fears. She didn't know how to live or go on, her dreams now shattered.

He looked at her and said what might seem like harsh words. "Tova, God did not put you on earth to sit around and cry about things you cannot change. The scriptures say, " This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

The pastor then left the room and soon came back with the church's human resources director. He said, "Tova, you need a job. You need to get out of your home, and we need help at the church.. I will see you at 9 am on Monday." Then he promptly left the room and left Tova and the HR director to work out the details.

Tova says she thought her pastor had lost his mind. Never in a million years did she expect this kind of response from him. Was this how God gave comfort? It sure didn't feel like it.

Walking into the church that day had taken monumental courage. Tova was so weak and broken and suffering. She was filled with feelings of worthlessness and failure. Heartache. Sometimes it was hard just to breathe. It was excruciatingly hard to hold a conversation. How in the world could she commit to a job? It all seemed impossible.

But Tova was in for her own transformation story. The first six months were the roughest. Some days, just getting out of bed took all the energy she had. She still cried a lot, but soon the clouds began to lift. Sometimes she even caught herself smiling. In that church, God revealed himself to her in ways that she never imagined. She experienced God's love, witnessed his miracles-healing power in her own life.

Over the next few years, she moved from serving in adult ministry to youth ministry, to eventually becoming one of the church's pastors. God's healing power called her out of her grief and pain and showed her how to be Christ's disciple.

Even so, with all the reassurances of God's presence and power and activity in her life, Tova sometimes becomes fearful.

That's natural. We are human. Being a follower of Jesus isn't always easy. Jesus is not Santa Claus, appearing occasionally to lavish gifts on us. Sometimes being a disciple requires more of us than we think we can handle. And sometimes following Christ requires sacrifice.

Jesus didn't leave Peter, James, and John up on that mountain alone. In short order, Jesus would be put to the ultimate test. When he came down from that mountain, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. He didn't abandon his disciples even then, when his very life was threatened. No. Jesus was faithful to the end.

And that's good news for us. Jesus will never forsake us or leave us. He will be with us to the end.

Tova says she wakes every morning and asks God to light her path and show her the way. Sometimes, it scares her that this is her prayer. What if God takes her someplace she doesn't want to go? Or directs her to do something she doesn't want to do?

She knows the answer and so do we: if God calls us into a work, God will give us the skills and courage to accomplish it. What if we don't feel equipped to handle this task? Then we can borrow from God. In God's storehouse, we find a supply of strength and courage that never runs out or passes its expiration date.

Our last stop that cold spring day in New York, was to visit the Statue of Liberty. Rain drizzled as we boarded the ferry that would take us across the harbor. Visibility was no better than it had been at One World Trade. And now we were on the water and there was a great big ocean out there. The majority of the kids went up on the top deck, where they would be assaulted by the wind and rain. They were so in hopes of seeing that iconic symbol of welcome.

I found a seat and started counting life vests. And I started listening . To the sounds of the passengers, of course, but also to the sounds of the ferry's motor. To the sounds of the choppy water slapping its sides. To the sounds of the fog horn, its lone voice calling mournfully across the water, reminding us of the presence of one we could hear, but could not see.

\*Affirmation of Faith            The Apostles' Creed p. 35

\*Hymn 580 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Intercessions for Lent

Jesus, remember us when you come into your kingdom.

As we journey with you toward Jerusalem, may we be aware of both crisis and opportunity in this life of discipleship. Increase in us our capacity to empathize, to work for peace, to forgive as you have forgiven us.

Hear now our prayers for the world, our neighbors, and ourselves:

**For your church around the world, we ask for new life.**

**For all who carry out ministries in your church, we ask grace and wisdom.**

**For those who have accepted the spiritual disciplines of Lent, we ask inspired discipleship.**

**For Christians of every land, we ask unity in your name.**

**For Jews and Muslims and people of other faiths, we ask your divine blessing.**

**For those who cannot believe, we ask your faithful love.**

**For governors and rulers of every land, we ask your sober guidance.**

**For people who suffer and sorrow, especially your sons and daughters in Ukraine, Syria, Turkey, Israel, Gaza, and Palestine, we ask your healing peace.**

Holy God, Your Word, Jesus Christ, spoke peace to a sinful world

and brought humanity the gift of reconciliation,

by the suffering he endured.

**Teach those who bear his name to follow the example he gave us.**

**May our faith, hope, and charity**

**turn hatred into love, conflict to peace, and death to eternal life.**

We lift our prayers to you now for the health and well-being of our church members, families, and friends in their particular circumstances. *Silence.*

Save us from weariness, but, strengthen us to seek health and wholeness for all people, here and everywhere.

We lift our prayers with the confidence of the children and God, saying, **Our Father...Amen.**

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn 607    Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

**Blessed are you, O God, giver of all things. Through your goodness, we have these gifts to share.**

**Use us and what we have gathered, in serving the world with your love and compassion, through the one who gave himself for us,**

**Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

\*Hymn 724    O, Jesus, I Have Promised

\*Blessing

Go now, and live before God in openness and integrity.

Set your minds on the ways of God,

not clinging to your own life,

but taking up your cross to follow Jesus.

And may God give you a share in the eternal covenant;

may you be found faithful when Christ comes again in glory;

and may the Holy Spirit strengthen you in faith and courage,

and lead you in the way of righteousness. Amen.

\*Postlude