

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Transfiguration of Our Lord
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

And the Lord said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And the Lord said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the water, and let it separate the waters from the waters," and there was a dome. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And so and so forth.

Day by day, God created. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day, the fourth day, the fifth and sixth days.

And then God rested on the seventh.

But what about the eighth day?

PAUSE

Now, surely you are all sitting there thinking, "What eighth day, Pastor?"

"There is no eighth day. There are only seven days in a week, Pastor."

"What are you talking about, the eighth day?"

Oh, but what if there is an eighth day?

PAUSE

Indeed, sisters and brothers in Christ, in the early church, Christians professed that the resurrection occurred on the eighth day, the day AFTER the Sabbath.

The Sabbath fell on the seventh day of the week, the day of rest, but then Jesus was raised on Sunday, that next day.

Easter fell on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath.

Jesus was raised on the eighth day.

Indeed, there is a reason then why our gospel reading this morning begins in the unusual way it does.

It reads, “Now about eight days after these sayings...”

“Eight days after Jesus’ teachings...”

To be sure, the phrase “Eight days after...” may not be just Luke’s way of transitioning here from one part of his gospel to the next.

No, the phrase “Eight days after...” may be Luke’s way of alluding to the fact that this story of Jesus’ Transfiguration is connected to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Yes, the Transfiguration is meant to be a glimpse, a foreshadowing, a vision of Jesus’ resurrection that will take place in the near future.

After all, when Jesus comes down from the mountain, almost on the cusp of the Transfiguration, the text says at 9:51, that Jesus then set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Jesus sets his sights on Jerusalem where he will be crucified and raised from the dead.

The Transfiguration then is the turning point in Jesus’ ministry.

The Transfiguration is a foreshadowing what is to come.

The Transfiguration is a vision of God’s new creation in Jesus Christ.

That is what the eighth day is after all all about.

The eighth day is about the new creation.

On the first day, God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

And on the eighth day, God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

After eight days, Jesus was transfigured, such that Jesus’ face was changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Jesus’ resurrection light, the light of new creation is brilliantly shining here.

And Peter and James and John witnessed this light, this glory of God in the person of Jesus.

Yes, when we think of that word “glory,” we are to think of a brilliant light.

The Transfiguration foreshadows then Jesus’ resurrection, because at the resurrection, Jesus, too, is described as “coming into his glory.”

The eighth day is the day of new creation, when Christ shines in glory.

The eighth day is the day of new creation, when our lives too will shine with the light of God’s grace.

PAUSE

And we call this Sunday of the Transfiguration a mountaintop experience.

A mountaintop experience is an experience which is defined as life-changing, life-altering.

A mountaintop experience is an experience that is transformative.

It changes how we see ourselves.

It changes how we view life and the world around us.

A mountaintop experience is an existential moment, in which our very existence has shifted, has pivoted, from that existence before the mountaintop experience to that which it is now.

A mountaintop experience marks a most significant turning point in our lives.

For many, having children is a mountaintop experience.

For many, falling in love is a mountaintop experience.

For some, having arrived at some remarkable insight is a mountaintop experience.

For some, accomplishing some amazing feat is a mountaintop experience.

I am sure many of the athletes at the recent winter Olympics would describe their participation in that international competition as a mountaintop experience.

And it may be the case that we experience not just one mountaintop experience but several in our lives.

It may be the case that at different points along our life's journey we are blessed with multiple life-changing moments, life-altering incidents.

PAUSE

And, there is reason, of course, why we call such transformative moments "mountaintop" experiences.

The obvious reason is because they make us feel as though we are on top of the world.

But there is another reason.

In the ancient world, it was believed that one went up on a mountain to be closer to God.

One went up on the mountain, in fact, to meet God.

For if God lives up there in the sky, then one has to get up closer to the clouds so that one can interact with God.

This is why Moses went up on a mountain to receive the Ten Commandments.

This is why those in that familiar story from Genesis were building the Tower of Babel.

This is why Mayans built those high platforms in Central America.

This is why the Babylonians built ziggurats.

People from time immemorial have always understood the gods to live way up there, and in order for us to be closer to the gods, people have been compelled either to go up a mountain or to build a structure to reach up to the heavens.

And it seems that Jesus was no different.

Jesus goes up a mountain with Peter, James, and John, so to be closer to God.

So then a mountaintop experience may be defined in another way, than just an experience where one feels on top of the world.

A mountaintop experience is an experience where we experience the divine.

And it is true that there is something of the experience of the divine in the birth of a child, or in falling in love, or in some remarkable insight, or in some amazing feat.

But, it is not just enough to experience a mountaintop experience.

It is not just enough to have had a remarkable insight, an amazing feat.

It is not just enough to fall in love, or to have a child.

But the question is what do we do in response to that mountaintop experience?

And it is this question, THIS QUESTION, which is being addressed in our gospel lesson today.

It is this question that being asked of Peter and his companions.

The question is this, "Now that you have glimpsed the new creation...now that you have seen a vision of the eighth day...now that you have looked upon the very glory of God, what are you going to do about it?"

And what do the disciples do?

Well, Peter says, "Hey, let's make three dwellings?"

In other words, "Let's just stay here together in this happy place."

"No need for us to go anywhere. No need for us to do anything more. Let's just set up camp and live on this mountain together. It will be our happy little home."

But that was the wrong response.

No, we can't just bask in the glory of the mountaintop experience, whatever it is for us.

No, we can't just revel in the moment. No, we must do something in response.

Our Lord Jesus did not just allow his disciples to sit there on the mountain.

No, instead Jesus leads his disciples back down the mountain.

Jesus leads his disciples off the mountain because in order to obtain that vision of glory, Jesus must first die on the cross.

There is no resurrection without Good Friday and the cross.

And Jesus must then head for Jerusalem.

And we as the church must journey with Christ to Jerusalem, which is why Lent begins this week on Ash Wednesday.

The church's journey to Jerusalem and the cross begins this week.

PAUSE

No, we just can't bask in our mountaintop experience. We must respond in faith.

That is the message for us today.

And the truth, Friends, is that every week, every Sunday, we experience the divine right here.

The truth is every week we experience a mountaintop experience.

The truth is God meets us here, on the crest of this hill on Progress Avenue.

God meet us here on this mountain and God transforms us here week-in and week-out.

We are made a new creation over and over. We experience the eighth day over and over.

Because every week God reveals God's self to us, like God revealed God's self in his Son Jesus Christ to Peter, James, and John.

Every week God forgives us again our sins.

Every week God feeds us with the body and blood of his Son.

Every week God speaks God word to us in the reading of scripture, in the preaching of the sermon, in the lyrics of the hymns.

Every week God reveals God's self to us, and thus every week we experience the divine.

Here we encounter God on the mountain.

This is our weekly mountaintop experience.

But the question is, "How will we respond?"

We can't stay here in church from one Sunday to the next Sunday.

We have to back down the mountain. We have to go out into the world. But the good news is that Jesus goes with us.

But how will each of us respond to this mountaintop experience?

Will we go and be an agent of God's healing in the world? Will we forgive others? Will we be merciful and compassionate? Will we bless others with hope in our words and deeds?

Will we go and be an agent of God's power in the world? Will we continue to feed the world with God's love? Will we continue to clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, and provide for the poor among us?

Will we go and allow for God's glory to continue to shine in the world through us?

Or will we set up a figurative camp in our lives, and not extend the vision of God's glory to others?

You see, WE can be and are in fact called to be an agent of the power of Christ's resurrection, WE are called to bring the good news of the eighth day, WE are called to bring the good news of new creation, but WE have to be willing to come down off the mountain.

We have to be willing to follow Jesus, to bear the cross of the world's suffering, and to offer God's abundant grace.

For today is the eighth day. Today is the day of resurrection light. Amen.