



Sermon – March 2, 2025

Luke 9:28-45 My extended family has a game we liked to play together when I was younger. The game is called “Signs”--maybe you have heard of it, or played it as well. It starts with each person picking a “sign” for themselves—it could be tugging on your earlobe, or making a thumbs up, or any number of things. Once we all know each other's signs, we would make a circle with someone in the middle. We would try to pass the signs around the circle without the person in the center figuring out who “had” the sign. You have to be stealthy so the person in the middle doesn't see you, but obvious enough that the person you're trying to signal sees you and recognizes what is going on and can “accept” that they have received the sign. Some of my favorite moments were always when someone either didn't see that they were being signaled to, causing the person trying to pass them the sign to make it more and more exaggerated, or when the person in the center appears to catch the person making a sign and doesn't recognize what is happening right in front of them!

Our scripture passages today contain two BIG signs of Jesus' divinity and power and unlike the game my family played when I was younger, these are not signs that can be missed. They smack Peter, James, and John right in the face. First, we have Jesus' transfiguration—the story that names the festival we celebrate today, an awesome display of dazzling light and divine nature. The other, maybe lesser known, is Jesus' healing of a young boy. Both of these stories are revelations of Christ's power, a glimpse at the future glory to come in the resurrection.

They are also opportunities for us to reflect on the ways that we experience God. Maybe, you've had a moment like Peter, James, and John where all of a sudden you felt, saw, or understood the power of God in a new and tangible way. But there are also less obvious moments, everyday opportunities for all of us to be reminded of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. I think that prayer is the perfect place to start.

Prayer is the occasion in which the transfiguration takes place, the reason for the trip up the mountain in the first place. As we prepare for Lent, I think this season is a beautiful opportunity to think about prayer and other ways we experience God. Maybe, we even want to try new ones. Often, we think of Lent as time to restrict, to fast, or cutback. I also think it can be a time add, to try new things, and to think critically for ourselves and as a community about the practices, places, and people that allow us to feel God's presence.

There is a beautiful poem by Mary Oliver that I adore called *The Summer Day*. The last line in it, when she asks “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” is probably the most famous, but there is a part in the middle that I love (and that I think is often overlooked):

“I don't know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention”

I was talking to a friend this week who is discerning a new job. He was sitting outside of the offices of the potential place earlier this week, praying and thinking about the opportunity when it started to pour, the kind of storm you absolutely don't want to drive in. So he stayed a little bit longer, waiting for the storm to let up and when he finally went to leave the skies cleared up and a beautiful rainbow appeared. In that moment, he said he felt seen by and connected to God in a way he couldn't hardly put into words. But he also asked, how many other people saw that rainbow, and how many didn't even take a second look? Or how many interpreted it as something totally different?

In this season of Lent, I want to encourage us to give ourselves permission to lean into the unexplained and unexpected ways that God is at work. The story of the transfiguration is mysterious and mystical, it doesn't fit easily into boxes. But what it does do is ask us to pay attention—and paying attention, I think, is one of the best forms of prayer.

When we're paying attention, we know when to get away from the crowds and pray. When we're paying attention, we know when to come back down. When we're paying attention, we bear witness to those in our midst who need to experience God's love, grace, and healing. We are called to recognize the ways God's love shows up in our lives and move out of our comfort zones to share it with others. Sometimes, God is revealed in dazzling light and shining glory. And other times, God is revealed in how we love our neighbor. There is so much to see, if only we can pay attention.

Vicar Jesse Hershberger