

Transfiguration Sunday 2025
A Sermon by Chris Hensley
Based on Luke 9:28-36
Presented to Sardis Baptist Church
March 2, 2025

I must say that we have some magnificent proclaimers who are a part of this congregation and I shudder to think that any part of Christianity would dare to silence their voices. We are better for having heard the proclamations, encouragements, and challenges which we heard throughout February and I thank the Revs. Tillie, Kathryn, Hilary, and Debbie for your hard work and the dedication to your ministry.

Now, to our passages. We continue in Luke this year and find ourselves at a pivotal moment within the account. To this point Luke has offered much in the way of Jesus' ministry which has included teachings in parabolic form and otherwise, healings, and revealed Jesus to be a faithful Jew who is also inclusive in his ministerial work by ministering to and with Gentiles. To that faithful Jew point, Luke has taken great pains to include Jesus' Jewish lineage through the genealogy, the faithful home from which he emerges in that Mary and Joseph are shown taking the infant Jesus to be dedicated at the Temple and then are shown to be taking Jesus on pilgrimage when he reaches the appropriate age of twelve, and Jesus is also portrayed as spending a lot of

time having familiarized himself with the Hebrew scriptures and going to synagogue. In short, Luke pulls no punches when it comes to clearly identifying Jesus as a faithful Jew who set out to reform the faith into which he had been born rather than to found a new faith movement.

More specifically to our passages for this morning. Luke's account presents Jesus as having just offered a difficult teaching about his followers having to take up their cross and follow him after Peter had the revelation that Jesus is indeed the Christ or Messiah, the anointed one of God. Now, let's not romanticize the cross. This was an ancient tool of domination and control which the Roman Empire, emphasis on the word *empire*, used against slaves and non-citizens. Empires are the same regardless of the date on the calendar it would seem, harsh cruelty exacted against those deemed as "other" or not belonging. The disciples, all of whom were under the heel of Rome, would have known what that symbol meant, certainly not a symbol of hope and grace which the Church has adopted it as and intends it to be even still today.

Jesus has just dropped the mic with this teaching and now he has hand-picked three disciples to tag along with him up a mountain. With that, let's briefly look to our Hebrew Bible passage for this morning. Here Moses has

descended from another mountain where he has engaged with the Divine and brings evidence of this engagement in the form of tablets containing commands and a glowing face which emits such light that it startles and frightens the Hebrew people and they ask him to wear a veil. The connection here, which we will delve into more in a moment, begins with the idea that meaningful Divine encounters throughout the Hebrew scriptures are found on the top of a mountain. This carries into the Christian Testament as well. Further, Moses is the individual who represented the Law within the Hebrew Bible, more on that in a moment.

Flipping back to the Christian Testament, Jesus has ascended a mountain to engage with the Divine and have his own Divine revelation, though it is more for the benefit of his disciples than it is for himself. Jesus climbs the mountain and, as the disciples do, they get sleepy while Jesus engages with God through prayer. Luke has already, about three chapters earlier, placed Jesus on a mountain to pray just before selecting his disciples. Jumping backing to Moses, there are further connections to Jesus' experience in the form of a cloud, a theophany which represents the apparent Divine presence within these accounts. Moses experiences the glowing face after his encounter, Jesus similarly glows with a dazzling white light and then two

figures within the Jewish tradition appear to be speaking with Jesus and their topic of conversation is Jesus' looming exodus.

Moses and Elijah hold significant places within Judaism both together representing the summation of the two major portions of the Hebrew Bible in the Law and the prophets respectively. Elijah has already been named twice by Luke earlier in this very chapter, references to other Hebrew prophets and their claims that Elijah would return before the Day of the Lord to cleanse the Temple and the priesthood. Moses appears for the first time in Luke here, and the author ensures that we are getting the connection when the conversation turns to Jesus' own exodus, a reference to the leadership of Moses for the Hebrew people and the looming cross which Jesus must take up and has challenged his disciples to take up as well.

The disciples, waking from their slumber and led by Peter, insist on setting up a tent for each of the three figures. The disciples are portrayed here almost as children who have interrupted an adult conversation to insert their own two cents on the matter at hand without grasping the gravity of what is going on. In response to this, a voice emits from the cloud and identifies Jesus as "my Son, the Chosen," to whom the disciples must listen. In short, what is

happening here is that the two figures within Judaism who represent the summation of the Hebrew Bible, are seen talking to Jesus about his looming crucifixion and a Divine voice is heard imploring those listening to give ear to Jesus' words.

Transfiguration means to change. It is interesting to note that the disciples did not experience an immediate change from their experience of encountering these pillars of their faith tradition and the Divine voice. Instead they wanted to put up some tents. Later in this very chapter they are going to get into an argument about which of them is the greatest, become jealous of some other person driving out demons in Jesus' name who is not among their group, and then ask Jesus if they should call fire down on a Samaritan village because the Samaritans do not want to have anything to do with them. Clearly the disciples are leaning into their human natures and resisting change within their lives immediately following such a remarkable event.

A fitting reminder for us in this time, that true and meaningful change does not occur instantly. Like when we are attempting to learn a new skill, it does not happen overnight, we must work, make mistakes, try new approaches, until we figure it out and make a meaningful change for the

better. Christ followers are a transfigured people – whether they like that language or not – and we must exercise patience with ourselves and one another. Part of that transfiguration is taking seriously those teachings which Debbie and Hilary talked about over the last couple of weeks that do not sit well with us – loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us. I do not like those either. Yet, these teachings persist throughout the Law, the Prophets, and Jesus. My friends, we follow a loving and transforming God. Let us be encouraged to enact a loving transformation in this world.