

*Pastor Jana Schofield  
Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA  
Transfiguration Sunday  
February 27, 2022  
Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36*

I wonder if you can think back to a time in your life when you felt like you truly glimpsed the glory of God. A time when your faith felt bold and everything was right with the world, when you wished time could stop so you could always sense God's closeness like you did right then. Maybe it was when you were at a summer camp or listening to a beautiful piece of sacred music. Maybe it was right here in this sanctuary at a worship service or wedding or funeral when you felt like you truly beheld the glory of God.

The time that comes most easily to mind for me (I think I've told you this before) was a warm summer afternoon at Holden Village in the Cascade mountains when I was walking the labyrinth, and I heard what I believe was the voice of God saying, "I love you Jana and I am opening you gently." I looked up to see the sun shining brightly over the peaks above, and I truly felt at peace. I sensed Jesus' presence and I tried to soak it all in, wishing that feeling could stay around forever.

But, as I assume your experience of glimpsing the glory of God was, that feeling didn't last. I couldn't manufacture that mountaintop experience again. And honestly, I remember feeling a little bit depressed about it, maybe even ashamed that my faith wasn't strong enough to feel Christ's presence that closely again.

I am guessing that was the experience of Peter, James, and John when they saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain and Moses and Elijah talking with him. The disciples finally understood that the one they had left everything to follow was truly divine—and they saw and felt his glory there on the mountaintop.

And Peter wanted to soak it all in and for that feeling to last. "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah," Peter said. I want this feeling to stick around forever.

It was when he said this, though, that God's voice overshadowed his own: "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him." And then the disciples fell silent and told no one about what they had seen.

The disciples kind of shut down. I wonder if they felt ashamed, or afraid, or confused. I wonder if they were depressed, realizing that listening to Jesus meant hearing some hard things, like:

"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands."

"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

I am wondering if they went silent because they only wanted Jesus on the mountaintop when everything was right with the world, and they saw Jesus transfigured in glory. They wanted to avoid the hard parts of discipleship. They didn't expect that they would feel Jesus' closeness in times of betrayal and rejection and hard work and death.

Those disciples were as human as we are...wanting to walk with Jesus in glory, but not in difficulty.

As I'm sure you have been doing this week, I have been thinking about, agonizing over, and praying fervently for the people of Ukraine whose country has been invaded by Russia. There is no finding Jesus in glory there right now. People are either uprooted from their homes trying to find safety or even taking up arms against their oppressor. There is no standing

on a mountaintop or in a labyrinth or in a worship service where they could experience the kind of feeling Peter had when Jesus was transfigured.

But obviously that doesn't mean that Jesus isn't there. In fact, it is in the difficulty, in the struggle, that Jesus is found. It is in betrayal and rejection and hard work and death that God can be seen.

Jesus is found, God can be seen when people gather together to form a united community and resist evil powers.

Jesus is found, God can be seen when people from other countries pour their prayers and their money out for strangers in a country they hardly know anything about.

Jesus is found, God can be seen when people reach out to support one another through the most difficult and dangerous of times. When they do that, they are little Christs for one another.

Do you remember what happens in the gospel of Luke immediately after the disciples come down the mountain with Jesus after the transfiguration? They encounter an exasperated father whose son was seized by a demon. The disciples witnessed Jesus cast out the unclean spirit, heal the boy, and give him back to his father. They found Jesus, they saw the glory of God, in a crisis.

Let this be a reminder for us as we prepare to enter the season of Lent that Jesus is not found only in experiences like Peter's on the mountain.

It's ok to long for those experiences, and yes, you will still have them, but don't be disappointed when you don't have them frequently. Don't worry that your faith is somehow not enough if you're not always feeling that euphoria like Peter did. And perhaps don't even be alarmed if you think that coming back in person to church will solve all your spiritual problems and meet all your spiritual needs and it doesn't.

Because Jesus is found, God can be seen not just on the mountain and not just in this building, but also in sickness and death and in the middle of a war.

As we prepare to enter the season of Lent, perhaps the Lenten discipline you want to take on this year is finding the glory of God in the difficult spaces. In the shadows. On the long road. What's key is to look for the glory of God not only on the mountain, but in the valleys where there is sorrow, brokenness, and even unanswered prayer.

As scripture reminds us, God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. God's beauty is best contained in broken vessels. So may you find Jesus, may you see the glory of God, even in the valleys. Amen.

(All 5 verses How Good Lord to be Here—especially the last one—let us not remain on the mountain, but go with Jesus down to the plain.)