



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, FEBRUARY 15, 2026
EXODUS 24:12-18; PSALM 2; 2 PETER 1:16-21; MATTHEW 17:1-9

GET UP AND DO NOT BE AFRAID

John 1:29-42 [Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."]

You try explaining the transfiguration to a 5th grader – how Moses, Elijah and Jesus (figures who lived centuries apart in Scripture) all appear at the same time in today's Gospel.

Such was the lofty task I set out for myself many years ago as a newly minted priest. I was writing Sunday School lessons for their class and, for those who don't spend much time with this age group, they can be a tough crowd. (For those of you in this age group in this room, I'm not just talking about you. I'm talking to you too – and I

hope you'll hear me out.) Kids this age have been taught to ask for things like evidence and proof. They've been taking true/false tests for a while, and they know – you don't question the nature of reality in a true/false test. Well, you could, but teachers aren't likely to give credit for that kind of creativity. True, the questions are phrased so only a simple response is needed. The problem with the transfiguration, of course, and with most of life, is that it won't be reduced to any such test.

Before I could attempt an explanation, though, I wanted to review what Jesus' friends might have expected to see. Peter, James and John were Jesus' closest followers – they were Joshua to his Moses, if you will. So, when he takes them up a mountain and leaves the others behind, they know something is about to happen. Six days before, Jesus had asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered: “You’re God’s anointed, the son of the living God.” He thought he knew what that meant. He’d been hearing today’s psalm his whole life.

If you felt queasy hearing the psalm this morning, you’re not alone. The psalms don’t just mirror God to us; they mirror us to ourselves. Scholars think it was originally a coronation song for a new king, a kind of puff-your-chest-out warning to Israel’s enemies not to risk God’s fury by harming those who seek refuge in God. Our ancestors in the faith weren’t unique in blending faith and politics. They’re not the first or the last to claim God for their side. We might not like the sentiments expressed here; I don’t. But I can understand them. Sometimes, that’s the point – to name our feelings so we’re less likely to act on them. And I know what rage at injustice

feels like; I know how powerless I feel in the face of violence when I can’t or won’t respond in kind – and the last thing I want is a God who is as weak as I am. So, when Peter calls Jesus God’s Anointed, the son of God, when he echoes Psalm 2, he thinks he knows what that means for justice in this world from now on. It’s the occupier’s turn to be afraid now, right?

Fast forward six days. Peter and the others see Jesus in a whole new light on the mountaintop. The veil separating time from eternity lifts for a moment; past meets present, and everything is somehow now. That part’s not scary; it’s thrilling. It’s not what they see that fills them with fear; it’s what they hear. “This is my Son, the Beloved (they’re told)... listen to him.”

What do you mean – it’s not enough to be wowed by glimpses of glory? We can’t just get lost in mystic sweet communion and leave it at that? No. It’s when we’re reminded that we need to listen to Jesus, and not claim him as our prized possession, that reality hits. What if all that talk about turning the other cheek and loving our enemies is truly the word of God? What if the end isn’t charity at some hand-shaking distance – but justice for all of God’s

children? What if we too will need to answer for how we treat the most vulnerable among us – not just at our borders but down the street? I might fall down in fear too.

Listening to Jesus takes a lifetime. We can start, though, with what he says right here. “Get up and do not be afraid.” Fear doesn’t help those we’re called to stand with and to serve.

This is not all we need to hear, of course. Jesus says a lot more that we need to listen to as well. These first words on the edge of Lent – they’re not a blinding light spelling out exactly what justice looks like in our time. No, they’re more like a lamp shining in a dark place, giving us just enough light for the next step.

That might be what we need for now. That’s the conclusion I reached with my 5th graders anyway. It’s not my job to explain the transfiguration to you, any more than I’d want you to explain to me what I hear when we sing our best hymns, or what I felt in the depths of the Grand Canyon, or what I saw once in the face of Desmond Tutu at a clergy

conference. Glimpses of God cannot and probably should not be explained.

In the meantime, how do we remember that faith is not a simple true/false test, but a gift we grow into over time? Maybe it starts with the questions we ask and the answers we accept. In pastoring 5th graders for the last 20+ years, I’ve learned a few things from them. While they can navigate the outside world with things we can prove, their inner worlds are still full of imagination and play and possibility. They hold their lives together with stories; it’s how they find their place in this confusing and chaotic world. They can still live by the power of a good and true and beautiful story, of the love of God that became human and dwelt among us, a love that’s good news not just for some nations, but for all. And their good news is our good news too. Even when we’re scared to death of listening to Jesus for what it means for our lives – for who we’re called to stand with and to serve, we can still get up and not be afraid. Even a glimpse of glory can be enough. Amen.



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