



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION, AUGUST 8, 2021  
EXODUS 34:29-35; PSALM 99:1,5-9; 2 PETER 1:13-21; LUKE 9:28-36

## THRESHOLDS

**Luke 9:28-36** [*Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" — not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.*]

In my upcoming sabbatical, I am really excited about exploring Celtic spirituality – that ancient Christian tradition that dates back to the fourth century British church in Iona and later took deep root in Ireland.

The heart of this spirituality is an emphasis on the holiness of creation and the presence of God's grace in all people and saturating daily life. Fingers crossed that travel remains possible because I hope to experience holy places in Ireland and Iona and to spend time

in the landscapes of my ancestors. It is a pilgrimage of sorts.

Celtic prayer draws from many sources, including wisdom literature in the Bible and the beauty and resilience of nature, which is its own revelation. There are many contemplative practices in the Celtic tradition that seek to embody the spiritual journey beyond just thinking about it. We are embodied spirits after all – we know things are true because we experience them by

seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling.

One foundational Celtic way is the practice of thresholds. A literal threshold, of course, is that strip of wood or metal at the base of a door where the outside gives way to the inside, and the practice of thresholds can include noticing those physical points of transition in daily life.

But the practice goes deeper than that to honoring all the thresholds we encounter – the times and places in our lives where old ways of being are falling away and the new is just emerging. Like the turning of life's seasons as we age, or shifting relationships, restlessness of the status quo, or sense of a new vocation. Thresholds are “thin times” or “thin places” where heaven and earth are close together and the veil between worlds is thin. They are as much imaginal places as they are physical.<sup>1</sup>

The Celtic practice of thresholds is to notice and give thanks for this in-between, liminal space, holding the vulnerability of not knowing what comes next while trusting that God's heartbeat is already giving it life. Thresholds are rich and powerful places where we come to know God and God's

desires for us in deep and transformative ways.

Our gospel today tells the story of one such threshold for Jesus' disciples – the story of the transfiguration. It is a turning point in Luke's gospel where accounts of enthusiastic crowds seeking Jesus' healing and teaching give way to Peter's earth-shattering confession of Jesus as Messiah.

Jesus commands them to tell no one, and then foretells his suffering, death and resurrection. And he defines discipleship, “If anyone wants to come after me, they must take up their cross and follow me.” The old is giving way to something new and there is a sense of deep foreboding. So, Jesus takes Peter, John, and James with him up a high mountain to pray.

There they encounter a thin place. As the three disciples struggle to keep awake, Jesus' face and clothes become brilliant white and the glory of God surrounds him in conversation with Moses and Elijah. A large cloud overshadows them all and the disciples hear, “This is my beloved son; listen to him!”

Imagine how overwhelming that would be for the disciples; put yourself in their shoes: the dazzling light of Jesus' face, the temperature dropping when they enter the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Soul's Slow Ripening*, Introduction and Chapter 1.

cloud, the solid timbre of the divine voice. It recalls the story of Moses talking with God on Mt. Sinai.

The disciples are wide awake now from their spiritual and physical sleep, stunned into silence, beholding Jesus as prophet, liberator, and God's son. Jesus hasn't changed, he's held this identity all along; but the disciples are profoundly changed. They are still frightened, but at this threshold they know the presence of God in a new way.

Today we celebrate the Transfiguration as a special baptismal feast day for those who've had to wait for the sacrament due to COVID. Baptism is an ancient and powerful threshold – a thin place where one awareness gives way to another, where the grace of God is understood in a new way. That's true not just for the one being baptized, but for everyone present.

At the 11 am service, three children will be baptized – George, Atticus, and Maggie. Along with their parents and godparents, they will renounce the things that draw them away from the love of God and affirm their trust in Jesus Christ. And we will join them in affirming the baptismal covenant, our commitment to discipleship, service, justice, and peace. With God's help.

Then they will be sprinkled or immersed in holy water in the triune name of God. They

will be anointed with chrism, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever. It is a spiritual threshold where they join the countless Christians across time and space who have received the sacrament of new birth and been affirmed as God's beloved child.

Of course, George, Atticus, and Maggie have been loved by God since the moment they came into being. Nothing mediates that love or could ever separate them from it. But the physicality of the baptismal ritual – the touch of the cool water, the smell of the fragrant oil, the sight of the bright candle – all that embeds the knowledge of their belovedness deep within them. God does not change in baptism, we do.

The pandemic has been an experience of threshold after threshold. Whether it is COVID, racial injustice, or our own mortality, our understanding of the world has shifted again and again. And there is still a profound unknowing of what comes next. We are in a thin time and a thin place. It may not be comfortable and it is where the Holy One meets us with the power to transfigure and heal.

So, as we turn to a new season in this church community and in your own homes, notice and rest at the thresholds. Hold the vulnerability of not knowing what comes

next and trust that God's heartbeat is already giving it life. And when you are sprinkled with water from the font today, may you remember your baptism, too, and be filled

with the knowledge of God's presence and your own belovedness.

Amen.



*Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!*