

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace, from God our Father
and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen...**

Seven weeks ago, the beginning of epiphany, we heard the story of Jesus being baptized by John, and the gospel of Luke notes that just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, the heavens were opened and the Spirit descended like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus hears the voice of God and it marks the beginning of his ministry.

Now, six chapters later in the gospel of Luke, Jesus leads Peter and James and John up a mountain, Jesus’ clothes become dazzling white, a cloud overtakes them and again we hear a very similar refrain, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” The words of God are directed to his disciples. Our season of Epiphany has been “book-ended” with God reaching down and making claims upon Jesus; Jesus is the Son, the Beloved, the Chosen.

This upcoming week we will make a turn and begin the Lenten journey. The focus of our gospel readings will jump from the beginning chapters of Luke, to the ending chapters of Luke. The drama will include Good Friday with Jesus hanging on a cross. And we will hear a Roman centurion say, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

Our transfiguration text for today is a link of sorts, connecting beginnings with endings. Connecting epiphany with lent, connecting baptism with resurrection. As Jesus is transfigured, so is everything we’ve come to know about God. In a very real way transfiguration is a mysterious event, it’s a sign that change is in the air.

Six years ago I attended a big conference in New Mexico; a thousand people there. The conference was held at a large hotel located on Santa Anna Pueblo, it is owned by a Native American Tribe called the Tamaya. The Hotel is surrounded by hundreds of acres of woods, trails, mountains, and is right next to the Rio Grande River-- beautiful and picturesque setting.

The main presenter was a depth psychologist who elaborated on a developmental model of psycho-spiritual maturity. It starts with childhood, goes through adolescence, adulthood and finally elder hood. Each stage in his model has certain characteristics, or qualities that he uses to differentiate each stage from another. His model really resonated with me. His description of spiritually mature elders was spot on with my experiences.

We spent a lot of time listening to his lectures, and we also spent a lot of time as he would call it "on the land." We did a lot of exercises that were designed to get us to notice and pay attention to what he would call, "the non-human world."

For instance, we went on a praise walk; we were to walk alone and be intentional about noticing God's unique handiwork in all the plants, animals, and environment. It was an eye opener for me to realize that I walk through God's good creation all the time, and because I'm so wrapped up in my head, I don't always notice as Jesus would call it "the birds of the air, or the lilies of the field."

One time we were invited to go wandering, just go anywhere our hearts desired and see if there was something that would catch our attention. And again, I'll be honest; and as I mentioned a couple weeks ago, I'm not much for random

wandering, especially if it means walking beside a thousand other bewildered people, so I went the opposite direction.

I found a nice comfortable bench, and the sun was still shining; and it was warm, I was tired, I thought maybe I'd take a little snooze...

I closed my eyes and probably slept a few minutes. When I looked up again, the sun was setting somewhere behind me, I was in the shadows and off on the horizon straight in front of me was a mesa that was literally shining. It was stunning! A flat topped mountain, all lit up in a yellow glow. It was dazzling!

The light from the sun was refracting and reflecting in such a way that the side facing the sunset, seemed to shimmer; there were long shadows, cracks and crevices. It was a beautiful sight. I guess you could say it caught my attention.

Well, I sat there and enjoyed the view. It was certainly unexpected, and that led me to wonder if it might mean something? Why did I notice this shining mesa? Isn't that what we humans do? Whenever we have a unique experience, we wonder, what does this mean?

We are always interpreting our context. And so we often wonder, "Is this a sign?" Sometimes we interpret "a sign" in a positive way. And sometimes we interpret a sign in a negative way. Often our fears take over and we become like Chicken Little, "The sky is falling, the sky is falling."

I think this is where we encounter the disciples this morning. Peter, James and John have followed Jesus up the mountain, they are tired, perhaps it's dusk, and

Jesus' clothes become dazzling white. The disciples notice that Jesus is talking with the long shadows of Jewish tradition, Moses and Elijah. Not only do they represent the law and the prophets, Moses and Elijah were also considered apocalyptic leaders; leaders bringing about end times.

But not “end times” as our culture often thinks of it, but rather in terms of cultural transformation-- an ending of one way of being, and a beginning of a different way of being. For instance, Moses led his people out of slavery and into freedom. It was a whole cultural transformation; the end of bondage, and what became the beginning of freedom.

And according to Jewish expectation, God would usher in a new age during the Festival of Booths. So Peter's comment about building dwellings or booths is not so random. Peter fears he recognizes Moses and Elijah, those apocalyptic heroes and makes the connection that an end time is coming and consequently it's time to build dwellings.

As it was for Peter, James and John, the ending of one thing and the beginning of change is terrifying. I often have conversations with people worried about the future. They wonder what's wrong with the world. They wonder if the world as we know it will eventually implode. I have to confess; I sometimes worry and despair of that myself.

When you look around; our weather patterns seem to be changing, our politics are toxic, our institutions are crumbling, and churches of every denomination are declining. There are a lot of terrifying things to be scared about. Change is happening, and frankly it is a little frightening.

Those disciples are a lot like us, they can see the world changing around them... They suspect a big change is in the wind. And they wonder, what does it mean? What's the future going to look like? Who is this Jesus? What is this kingdom? What's this talk about being killed and rising from the dead? For Peter, James and John, there are a lot of scary talk happening...

Well, back at the conference, I later returned to my comfortable bench and reflected on that mesa, that table top mountain. I began to wonder how long it had stood there. How big it was, and in relation to the whole universe how small it was. I began to imagine how big God was, and how small I felt. It was a sensation of vastness and smallness; and all at the same time.

I remembered as a kid lying on my back in the front yard of the farm at night, looking at all those stars. I used to have that feeling then as well. Vastness and smallness.... The God of all this amazing good creation has been here a very long time. This God has set the foundation for all things. His vastness is way beyond my tiny, little mind. And I can scarcely begin to imagine His mysterious ways.

We do live in a time of change, perhaps a time of darkness and chaos. And it is scary. And yet the God of all mystery, the architect of all creation is still firmly in charge; speaking new creation out of chaos. I may not be able to understand all this, but for some mysterious reason my heart is able to trust.

The good news this morning is that Jesus is indeed the Chosen, the Beloved, the Son of God and our light in the darkness. We do listen to Jesus, and we've experienced God's love and mercy. God miraculously transfigures even our fear into faith, so that we too may shine with the gospel of Christ.

And every time I see loving, kind and gracious people, like so many of us here, I know with all my heart that the Kingdom comes... And it's all God's work...

Amen...