

## TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 11, 2024

2 KINGS 2:1-12 | PSALM 50:1-6 | 2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6 | MARK 9:2-9

There are few conversation starters worse than “Let me tell you about the dream I had last night.” The problem, of course, is that anything can happen in a dream. Other people’s dreams are just one non-sequitur after another. I was in my second-grade classroom. Then I was being chased down the hallway. Then Paul McCartney taught me how to write a song. When they finally finish, you might have nothing to say except, “Wow. Sounds crazy.”

Hearing the story of the transfiguration from St. Mark’s gospel might feel like hearing about someone else’s dream. It seems like one random thing after the next. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain. Then Jesus’s clothes change color. Then Moses and Elijah show up. Then Peter pitches Jesus on an infrastructure project. Then there’s some voice from heaven. Then everything disappears, and Jesus tells the disciples not to tell anyone about what just happened.

Wow. Sounds crazy.

And yet, this is a very important story. One that shows up in all three of the synoptic gospels. So what exactly is Mark trying to get at here? Well, this is a story with lots of layers of meaning stacked on top of each other. But this morning, I want to give you just one way to think about it.

The transfiguration story is a kind of Easter story. It sounds like an appearance of the risen Jesus. You get a hint of that in the white clothes and dazzling light. But if it is, then it’s an Easter story that comes halfway through the gospel. And so it becomes a sort of preview. Peter, James, and John get a sneak peak of Jesus’s identity as God’s Son that will only become fully apparent to the other disciples later on, after his resurrection.

In other words, even though they’re not done following Jesus, they know how it’s going to end. And even though we’re only halfway through Mark’s gospel, we know the story’s conclusion.

We usually think that once you know how a story ends, you’ve ruined the story. If you tell your friend that you want to read a new novel, and they respond by telling you about how there’s this crazy plot twist at the end that they go on to explain in great detail, you would be understandably annoyed.

But the way that St. Mark uses this story is different. Mark tells us the ending of the story so that we can fully appreciate and pay attention to what happens at each step along the way.

It’s almost like when you’re reading a novel, and you just want to find out how it ends. And for the last half of the book, you’re not reading closely. You’re not examining dialogue carefully. You’re not tracking character development. You’re just skimming so you can find out how it all ends.

Mark says, essentially, that I’m going to tell you the ending of the story halfway through so that you can pay really close attention to what happens along the way.

This is an intervention that we need not just in reading Mark’s gospel but in our lives, too. We spend a lot of our mental energy in one of two places. One, we spend time in the

**ADVENT** LUTHERAN CHURCH

777 WYCKOFF AVENUE | WYCKOFF, NJ 07481

(201) 891-1031 | ADVENTLUTHERANWYCKOFF.ORG

past. We think about decisions we made. Different ways things could have gone. Replaying old arguments with old grudges about old grievances. Or, two, we think about the future. Anxious about what lies ahead, how something is going to turn out, how some situation is going to land.

It can be remarkable just how little time we spend being truly present. I don't know about you, but I increasingly find myself not just multitasking but multi-timing. Doing something right now while my real attention is off somewhere else, maybe five minutes in the past or five years in the future.

And Peter, James, and John likely felt much the same way. Perhaps Peter was regretting his decision last week when he tried to talk Jesus out of his ministry. (Not his best moment.) Or maybe John was worried about where exactly this whole ministry of Jesus was going and what his role would be in it.

This is why St. Mark puts this story here. It's not meant as a spoiler that ruins the ending. It's meant to reassure us of where we're going so that we can really pay attention to what's happening right in front of us. Because our shame about the past and anxiety about the future have a way of obscuring our perception of what's really going on right now.

You see that in the instruction the disciples are given after this revelation, the voice which says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" In other words, be present. Watch carefully. Stay close.

Because even in those moments when following Jesus seems perilous or disorienting or difficult or just sort of boring, that same glory is always present. Sometimes it's hard to see. It's "veiled," to use St. Paul's image. But it's always there. It's easy to see God's glory when we visit a cathedral or listen to a Bach partita. Much harder when struggling with a difficult decision or feeling like we're languishing. But at every moment of our lives, that same unceasing light that sustained Christ's life, is always there.

There's a saying they have in the Jesuit tradition. *Age quod adis*. In English: *Do what you're doing*. On a basic level it could mean something simple, almost trite, like: *If you're reading a book, read the book. If you're walking the dog, walk the dog. If you're watching a movie, watch the movie*. But it becomes more profound when you think about experiences that aren't so pleasant. *If you're having a conversation with someone you find particularly difficult, have the conversation with someone you find particularly difficult. If you're doing tedious chores around the house, do tedious chores around the house. If you're praying in church, pray in church*. Instead of fleeing to the past or escaping to the future, stay present and listen to how God is calling you.

The Jesuits call this "finding God in all things," but we might call it "finding God in all times." Every moment of our lives, not just the impressive mountaintop ones, is created, sustained, and redeemed by the love of God. And trusting that the love of God is always with us, we can reflect the glory of Christ's love to those around us.

Not just in some overidealized past. Not in some far-off distant future. The love of God is fully poured out with us this day.

In other words, St. Mark might say, transfiguration is always happening. Listen.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor