

### 3-2-25 Sermon: “Weighed Down” – Luke 9:28-36

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday of Epiphany, before we enter the liturgical season of Lent.

Today, we read the story of when Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain to pray. And while they are there, Jesus is *transfigured* – his face begins to shine, his clothes change colors, Moses and Elijah appear with him, and everything is bathed in a dazzling light. A cloud overshadows the mountain, and a voice from the cloud says, “This is my son, my Chosen, listen to him!”

And then, as quickly as it began, it’s over. Everything is back to normal. And the disciples look at Jesus and say, “What kind of mushrooms did you say were in that salad we had at lunch?”

We read this story every year in worship. It is very strange. But I’ll be honest, this year I found myself getting a little bored with it – a little burnt-out on transfiguration, if you will – because if we read it together every year, is there anything *new* to say about the transfiguration?

The transfiguration also shows up in Matthew and Mark’s gospels, but this lectionary cycle, we’re reading from Luke. So I turned to Luke and said, “All right, it’s up to you, buddy. You got anything new or worthwhile to say?” And it turns out he does!

There are a couple features that are unique to Luke: Luke’s is the only gospel that tells us what Jesus and the disciples were doing on the mountain (praying), or what Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are talking about – what Jesus is about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Luke’s transfiguration story is also the only one in which the disciples are “weighed down with sleep.”

Did y’all notice that? There’s a grand epiphany and fireworks show going on up on the mountain, but apparently Peter, James, and John are having a hard time keeping their eyes open to see it!

It’s a strange little detail. Most Biblical scholars think Luke imported it from the Garden of Gethsemane, another story where Jesus goes off to pray and these same three disciples – Peter, James, and John – fall asleep while waiting for him. And there’s some debate over what the actual Greek says: Did the disciples stay awake for the whole show despite being very sleepy, or did they initially fall asleep and then wake up to see these three holy men conversing in the dazzling light?

I feel for these disciples, weighed down with sleep. If God’s great revelation is going to take place any time after 9 PM – or even after a big lunch, for that matter – I, too, am going to be rubbing my eyes. But I also love this description of tiredness as being “weighed down,” because there is a weight – isn’t there? – that settles on our chests, our eyelids, our shoulders. There’s a *heaviness* that carries us off into sleep.

Of course, sleep isn’t the only source of that heaviness. Not the only force that weighs us down. I don’t know about you, but I have felt that weight on my chest a *lot* in recent weeks. I feel it when I read the news, when I watch life-sustaining systems I’ve taken for granted being dismantled. I feel it when I talk to loved ones who are suffering, or scared. I feel it when a wave of grief washes over me; it’s that weight on my chest that makes it hard even to breathe. Do you know that feeling?

And I can’t help but wonder if Peter, James, and John are feeling this kind of heaviness, too, if they are weighed down on that mountaintop with more than just sleep. Because right before this morning’s text, Jesus tells the disciples for the first time that he is on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die, to give his life for the lives of others. And in the same breath, he tells

them, “If you would be my followers, you too must take up your crosses, lay down your lives, and follow me.”

These are heavy teachings for the disciples. Not exactly what they signed on for. And I wonder if this adds to the overwhelm, the weight, the impulse to shut down, numb out, go to sleep. This world, Jesus’ teachings, these events – if it is all simply too much.

Friends, what is it that is weighing you down right now? What sits heavy on your chest? What makes you want to close your eyes, turn away, hunker down so that God’s light couldn’t make it in, even if it tried?

The disciples almost sleep through the whole show. They almost miss the miracle, the epiphany, the dazzling glory of the presence of God. And y’all, that makes me wonder: what manifestations of God’s presence might *we* be missing because of all that weighs us down? Could our heaviness be keeping our gazes too low, so that we, too might miss the light when it comes?

For this is what today offers us. In a broken, heavy, fearful world, the transfiguration gives us a few brief moments of dazzling light.

Living at 7,000 feet, we know thing or two about what happens when things are exposed to the light. Light has the power to melt, to soften. Light opens things up, reveals what is hidden, but has been there all along. Extended exposure to the light of the sun weakens fabric so that it tears more easily. Add some water to that light, and the freeze-thaw cycle will crack open even the hardest of rocks.

It seems light does the same thing to people. It melts us. It makes us softer and more tender. Standing on the mountaintop, glowing with God’s light, we let down our guard and acknowledge our vulnerability. Linger in the light long enough, and surely our hearts will break right open. Our hopes, our aches, our fears, our sorrows, our full selves come to the surface because in God’s light we know that we are beloved and safe.

Mid-way through the Gospel, right before Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem, God gives Jesus and the disciples the gift of light. God comes near to them; God *shows up* in their heaviness.

The same thing happens when we come to this Table. Jesus comes near to us, sets a table among us, right in the middle of our journey. Christ shows up in our heaviness with a loaf of bread and a cup of wine.

Here at this table, Jesus says, “This is my body, broken for you.” And our heaviness needs to hear that, because we are seeing every day how bodies can be broken. But Jesus gives us bread and says, “When human bodies are broken, mine is broken, too. I am here with you in this heaviness.”

Here at this table, Jesus says, “This is the cup of the new covenant, sealed in my blood, poured out for you.” And our heaviness needs to hear *that*, too, because *we* feel poured out, sopped up, empty. And Jesus says, “Yes. This is the Christian life, to pour ourselves out for one another. But you who are empty and thirsty, come to the waters and drink your fill.”

So friends, come. Come to this table and receive bread for the journey. Come stand in the light, and let its rays melt you, soften you, crack your heart open.

Bring your heaviness; bring all that weighs you down: Sleep, sorrow, fear, anger, worry, grief. Hold it in the light of God and allow it to be transfigured, if only for a moment.

We are not alone on this journey. Christ is here with us, in the heaviness. Amen.