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Transfiguration, YR. A
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Transfigured from Fear into Hope

Dr. John Koessler is a brilliant pastoral theology professor from my time in College. His wit is both biting and brilliant. One day in class he was passionately telling us something along the lines of how he would walk up and down the musty dimly lit stairwells in Fitzwater Hall and think to himself, “These are the good old days.”

I remember those times in seminary when I tasted the gift of life in community. There was such joy in being known and loved by peers and teachers alike. I would go out to Sandwich to visit family and then take the METRA back to the city, as it took that wide curve into Union Station and the skyline suddenly appeared and I would think to myself, something along the lines of “These are the good old days.”

I imagine moments whether mundane or monumental are coming for you. Experiences and seasons of life where time seems to stop and your entire future is shaped by them.

Speaking of those moments. There are ones that shape us and stay with us that we wish would not have happened or that we could rewind and take back. The untimely death of a loved one, a relationship that could not be reconciled, an event that we have no control over that hits us like a ton of bricks. Our whole lives are colored by those experiences. The present always carries the past with us as we tiptoe into the future.

The Lord summoned Moses up the mountain, and now it is Jesus who takes us with Peter, James, and John. Suddenly Jesus is transfigured, transformed, changed, his face shone like the sun, and his clothes dazzling white. One more epiphany. Jesus is revealed again as God of all creation clothed in your finite flesh. Yet, the epiphany is not complete without an appearance from Moses and Elijah as the past and present join as one. The new thing that God is doing in Jesus is connected inextricably to the God of Israel, the God of Moses, Elijah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then a voice speaks just as it did a month ago in the Jordan River. This is my son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased. And the disciples are terrified. In that moment of fear this transfigured Christ bends down to touch them. And speaks to them. “Get up and do not be afraid.” With that vision and word he leads them by the hand down the mountain and into a future vivified by that mountain top and all that will be revealed going forward. A future that they could have never fathomed. They would have found it futile, frustrating, or object failure. One that must go through death. The only other mountain Jesus will ascend is Golgotha.

On this in-between Sunday, as we look back at Christmas and forward towards Lent and Easter, we do so with all of our past and present. Our disappointments, our failures, and laments, our mountain top experiences of joy, the memories of good old days, and those events that shook us to our core and left us changed. And we look into the future not knowing what it might bring. We have hopes and expectations. Questions, uncertainty. What will happen to us, what about my health, or job, or family, that fractured relationship, or our fractured planet, divisions in family's or in our country. Or what about the church- not just here but all over North America with the decline in church attendance and the rise of the spiritual but not religious?

We cannot stay in the past, control the present, or control the future. As much as we would like to or burn ourselves out trying. And like those disciples we cannot stay on the mountain or go back up either. Like the disciples often we find ourselves overcome with fear. Like we are living in the shadow of the mountain and unable to see the road in front of us.

Struck by fear. This is precisely the moment that our transfigured, crucified, and risen savior comes to you and me. The God of the cross and empty tomb: from the other side of Easter. As a sign from the future. With his wounded and risen hands he touches you. With words of promise. Forgiveness and freedom from ourselves and from our own narrow agendas for that future. And with his own body and blood-- touching and your hands, on your lips as food and drink. Nourishment and sustenance. Gifts that do not destroy but renew you each day. The voice from Heaven has spoken. This time to you: "You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." This voice creates. This voice is the only one that has the power to tell you who you really are. Listen- because it is true. Mark it on your body whenever you pass this font. Let it make you free.

Christ says to his beloved: do not be afraid. His body has already gone down to the depths, death, and to the ends of your world- and he has come back again.

In this future we know that death and resurrection is the pattern of all things. We know that no death is the end. That life will emerge from all our graves. Even when it seems impossible. The God of all that is holds your past and present and leads you into a tomorrow. A tomorrow not of your own making, but promised by his work.

In this glow- we trust in the one who is future in flesh. Here all bets are off.

Each day with the morning star in our hearts, as Peter says- moved by the Holy Spirit, we can take the risk of vulnerability as his body down below. Here in the valley we no longer need to only look back longingly or in regret at the past, or wonder about the future. Just loosen the grip on our cleverly devised plans and lose our lives in love for our neighbors. Be liberated from your self-centered schemes. Turn your eyes outward. And live- again and again. Look for those captive to fear and as Christ- touch them, and envelope them in your care. And be ready,

especially for others to be Christ for you. Fail and then hear his voice: get up and don't be afraid. Fail and get up.

Tom- who we commended to God's mercy yesterday was such a witness to this liberating, open hearted life. Always looking for a way to find God in service, questions, and community. We follow Jesus- ahead. Until the past, present and future, all times and places, you and me, are transfigured forever.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.