

Sermon – Luke 9:28-36
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Grace Lutheran Church
Transfiguration – Year C
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“Exodus Down the Mountain”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. As a kid, whether we were leaving our grandparents’ home after Thanksgiving, or perhaps just our neighbors’ house after dinner, it always seemed odd to me that it took so long to say goodbye, but it turns out that’s just how Midwesterners do it. From the opening “welp” that signals the time to stand up to the hugs for everyone, from the open-door conversation to the second round of hugs, from the “ope, we really should be going now” to the front porch wave, it takes time to make a departure. It seems we northern folk like talking about saying goodbye more than we actually say goodbye. But what bothered me as a kid makes sense to me now. Sometimes we don’t want to say goodbye. Sometimes we want to stay right where we are, with the people we are with, for as long as we possibly can.
2. I don’t know if Peter would like ice fishing and tater tot casserole, but he otherwise seems to have the makings of a good Midwesterner. He doesn’t want to leave. In fact, so pleased is he to be on the mountaintop, he offers to build new dwelling places for Jesus, and for Moses and Elijah, these Old Testament titans whose presence bears witness to Jesus’ role as the One who fulfills the law and the prophets. Peter feels, perhaps, that he is simply following Jesus’ lead, because instead of just departing, Jesus has been discussing his departure with the others. But depart he must. The glory of the mountaintop moment must give way to the dusty, demon-filled valley below.

3. There's a moment during the departure in which the glory of the transfiguration shifts to a cloud that overshadows them. Peter and his friends, James and John, are overshadowed, overwhelmed, unable to see where they are going or what comes next. They are, in a word, terrified. Perhaps that is how you find yourself today. Afraid. Uncertain. Trust me, it's going around. Many of you have shared with me in recent days that you are overwhelmed. Fearful. For yourselves or for loved ones or just because of everything. Afraid of how policies will impact your family, your kitchen table, your retirement; afraid for those who already live at the margins and are now more marginalized, if not outright threatened; afraid of a world of shifting alliances, of alignments with authoritarian powers. Afraid to imagine what will come next in the news cycle. Perhaps not all of you feel this way in this moment, but we all nevertheless harbor our own fears in our hearts, unsure of how to take the next step. To which I would just say: Together. Together with each other, and together with Jesus. There's a moment of heartbreak at the end of the first season of *Ted Lasso* in which Ted addresses his soccer, er football, club. "There is something worse out there than being sad," he says, "and that is being alone and being sad. Ain't nobody in this room alone." As with sadness, so with fear. You might be afraid, but ain't nobody in this room alone. Jesus comes to you, lifts you up, dusts you off, sets you on your feet again, and gives you to one another. The glory we glimpse today will return. The cloud will not linger forever. And when we go back down the mountain, Jesus goes with us. Fear may come and go, but it need not paralyze you, and it cannot steal your hope, for your hope is in Christ Jesus, God's Chosen One, and he is leading the way.
4. This discussion of Jesus' departure is unique to Luke's telling of the transfiguration. Interestingly, the word in the Greek is "exodus," and the allusions are immediate. Jesus, like Moses before him, isn't just going on a journey. He is accomplishing a purpose. As Moses led God's people from

slavery to freedom, from Egypt to the Promised Land, so now does Jesus lead God's people from sin to forgiveness, from the powers of this world to the gracious reign of God, from death to life. It is a road that goes through suffering to the cross, but the road doesn't end there. For in his dying, the curtain between death and life will part, like the Red Sea before the people, such that God's people will journey safe to the other side. As we learned together with eight fourth graders at our Holy Communion retreat this past Friday, it is the meal from this first exodus that Jesus imbues with new meaning for his purposes, exodus food to feed our spirits and give strength to our hands and hearts as we travel forward.

5. We, church, continue on this journey today. The glory of the mountaintop seems far behind us. The clouds of uncertainty seem overwhelming. Still, while we do not know what hardships we will encounter on the way, we know in faith that the end of the journey is secure. The eighth day of the new creation has begun. Just so, we need not be afraid. Jesus is with us. Look around and see his glory reflected in the faces of your fellow travelers. Come, and feast upon Holy Communion, the meal on the way for the people of the way. It's good to have a moment on the mountain, but Jesus needs us in the valley, being resolute in our love, our faces reflecting the goodness of God for our neighbors around us. All of them. Each of them. And for the creation we live in, too. While we depart from this place, we do not depart from each other. In Christ, we are never apart. In Christ, we are never alone. So, let's get on with in. Welp, we really should be going. To the cross. To the empty tomb beyond it. To life. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.