

SERMON FOR MARCH 2, 2014

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i
United Church of Christ

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: Exodus 24:12-18; **Matthew 17:1-9**

Message: **"Transfiguration: GOD's Light is
Manifested in Jesus and to GOD's
People—the Church!"**



Gathering in the Word

When we experience the glory of GOD—that transforms everything! GOD’s dazzling light as in Exodus 24 and Matthew 17—reveals GOD’s vision for GOD’s people and the Creation! **GOD’s power and glory are always relational—between GOD and us people of the Church!**

Hearing the Word

Exodus 24:12-18 (The VOICE Bible)

Eternal One (to Moses): ¹² Come up the mountain to me and stay here *with me for a while*. I will give you stone tablets inscribed with my law and commandments in order to provide instruction *and guidance* for the people.

¹³ So Moses and his assistant, Joshua, got up and began the *long* climb up *toward the summit* of the mountain of God.

Moses (to the elders): ¹⁴ Wait here for our return. Aaron and Hur will stay with you. If anyone has a complaint, then they can speak to them.

¹⁵⁻¹⁶ Moses made his way up the mountain. A *thick* cloud blanketed the mountain because the Eternal’s glory had settled upon it. The cloud stayed there for six days; and when the seventh day arrived, the Eternal spoke to Moses from the cloud.

¹⁷ For the Israelites below, the Eternal’s glory appeared to be a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. ¹⁸ As Moses walked further toward the top, he was swallowed

by the cloud of *God's glory*, and he remained there for a *total of 40 days and 40 nights*.

Moses is up on Mount Sinai and enters into GOD's presence to receive GOD's commands, rules, statutes, and regulations. The Book of Exodus has two goals: **one** is to get the people out of Egypt (mission accomplished by Exodus 24) and the **second** was to find a way for a holy GOD to live in the midst of his unholy people. All the laws and regulations all add up to one thing: they point the way forward to guarantee and make sure that God can do what GOD so dearly wants to do—that is to live in the midst of his people!

By Exodus 40—the glory of GOD moves off the mountain into the Tabernacle! GOD wanted to live close to the people he loved. The Law would help to make sure that the relationship would continue. The Law was just temporary, a babysitter, that would bring us to the more mature stage when GOD would take care of all the details necessary to make an intimate relationship between GOD and us possible forever and ever!

So in Exodus—God ends up living in a tent (the Tabernacle Tent) — in the midst of the people!
Interesting when you think of God in Jesus Christ who is our Lord and Savior; then, GOD the Holy Spirit dwelling and living in us!

Note in our Gospel of Matthew 17 lesson—Peter mistakenly asks that they erect three tents (*skene* in

Greek and “tabernacle” in the Old Testament sense—to capture the glory of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah—but that wasn’t needed because once Moses and Elijah disappeared and **Jesus went back to looking like his ordinary-guy-from-Nazareth-self—Peter, James and John were standing in front of the living, breathing incarnation (*personification, embodiment, living form*) of the ultimate tent—the final TABERNACLE containing both the glory of GOD and Creation’s goal of GOD dwelling right in the midst of his people—JESUS himself!**

Matthew 17:1-9 (The VOICE Bible)

Jesus is providing an entirely different perspective on success and happiness. The new Kingdom is breaking in, and the new community is coming together. This is the logic of that Kingdom and that community: to inhabit God’s story, this is what must be done. To accrue fame and comfort and riches is counter to this new community. In the economics of this new community, real success is marked by a willingness to sacrifice one’s very life to God, and the promised rewards are immense.

17 ¹Six days later, Jesus went up to the top of a high mountain with Peter, James, and John. ² There, *something spectacular happened*: Jesus’ face began to glow and gleam and shine like the morning sun. His clothes gleamed too—bright white, like sunlight *mirroring off a snowfall*. He was, *in a word*, transfigured.

³ Suddenly there at the top of the mountain were Moses and Elijah, *those icons of the faith, beloved of God*. And they talked to Jesus.

Peter: ⁴ Lord, how amazing that we are here *to see these heroes of our faith, these men through whom God spoke.* Should I quickly build some shelter, three *small* tabernacles, for you, for Moses, and for Elijah?

⁵ As Peter spoke, a bright cloud enveloped all of them.

Voice from the Cloud: This is my beloved Son. With Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him.

This is but an echo of the Voice that spoke at Jesus' ritual cleansing in baptism. It is an echo of what God said through Moses during his final sermon on the mount. God promised that although Moses could not enter the Promised Land, He would send His people another prophet. Moses' very last wish for his beloved people was that they would listen to this new prophet when He would come.

⁶ This voice from heaven terrified the three disciples, and they fell prostrate on the ground. ⁷ But Jesus—*who was, by this time, used to His disciples being plagued by fear—* touched them.

Jesus: Get up. Don't be afraid.

⁸ And when the disciples got up, they saw they were alone with their Lord.

⁹ The four men hiked back down the mountain, and Jesus told His disciples to stay silent.

Jesus: Don't tell anyone what happened here, not until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

Why does Jesus often instruct his disciples to keep secrets? In this case, perhaps he does because he realizes that they will not understand the meaning of the transfiguration until they live through that other hilltop event—the death of Jesus on the cross. Believers like the disciples, will better understand this bath of light and revelation when they, too, come to Golgotha and the cross.

Today our focus **Christology**—the branch of theology concerned with the study of the nature, character, and actions of Jesus! For the second time in Matthew GOD breaks in to tell us who Jesus is. GOD says what GOD said at Jesus' baptism, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased—then adds;" Listen to him." Our understanding of Jesus has been that Jesus is fully human and fully divine—GOD! Jesus' two natures co-exist without confusion, without mixture, without altering the others.

- ✓ So what happened on the mountaintop is that the divine nature of GOD rose to prominence in a way that had not been seen or experienced before.
- ✓ Or we could say that for a few brief moments—the Father GOD showed the disciples what Jesus the Son of GOD had always looked like before he emptied or stripped himself of certain ordinary divine traits so as to become incarnately human.

For Jesus—his divinity (*holiness*) was on display every day of his life:

- ✓ Jesus' divinity was on display when he spoke kindly to ostracized women and outcast lepers.
- ✓ Jesus' divinity was on display when Jesus wept over a dead friend and when he smiled gently at a misguided yet earnest and sincere rich young ruler (*kanaka waiwai*).
- ✓ Jesus' divinity was on display even when a crown of thorns got pressed into Jesus' scalp—even when Jesus was hoisted up on a spit of wood like some grim scarecrow atop a garbage heap called Calvary!

When all the spectacle and manifestation was over, verse 8 says that only Jesus remained. This ***transfiguration*** always strikes us as being all about what can be *seen* and yet when GOD's voice thunders from Heaven—what GOD says is that the disciples must *listen* to Jesus! Apparently—if the disciples listen to what Jesus says—they will discover windows of glory they had never before expected!

Jesus says to the disciple to tell no one about what just took place—until Jesus was raised from the dead.

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us on this Transfiguration Sunday just before we head into the Season of Lent on Wednesday—Ash Wednesday:

1.ONE: Jesus did not transfigure into something he was not—but rather reveals to us what

Jesus already is as the true Messiah—the true Son of GOD!

- ✓ Jesus transfigured into his true glory—which was ordinarily hidden from the disciples' eyes on account of Jesus having **given up** his true divine powers in order to be born truly human.
- ✓ GOD showed the disciples what Jesus (as Son of GOD) had always looked like before he emptied and stripped himself of certain ordinary traits so as to become incarnately human.
- ✓ And it was Jesus' giving up of those divine powers and perquisites that spells salvation to all of us and GOD's Creation!

2.TWO: The Transfiguration always happens on the final day before we begin Lent his coming Wednesday, March 5, 2014.

THE GLORY AND FULLNESS OF GOD IS SHOWN BY JESUS NOW AT TRANSFIGURATON MOUNTAIN AND IN THE DAYS OF LENT TO EASTER!

Let us look for GOD's glory and fullness in the Season of Lent!

3. THREE: The story of the transfiguration directs us away from trying to understand Jesus only as he is revealed in glory.

THE STORY POINTS US DOWN THE MOUNTAIN AND INVITES US TO WALK WITH JESUS INTO THE SUFFERING AND HUNGRY CROWDS!

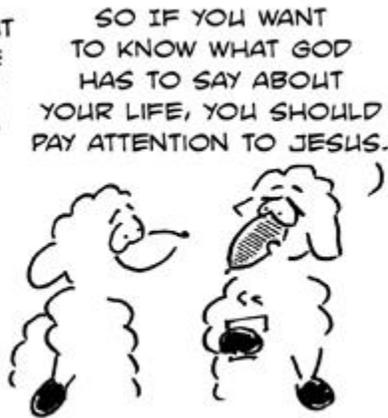
- ✓ Look for the Holy Spirit leading you in the Season of Lent in the weeks ahead.
- ✓ Who is the Spirit calling you to kōkua and support and help in the coming weeks of Lent?
- ✓ Keep your eyes open to be the presence of Jesus Christ in your neighborhood; at work; at the beach or wherever you are in the weeks ahead!
- ✓ Jesus calls all of us to be a helping and blessing presence to others this Lent.

Sent in the Word

In these forty days that lead up to Easter, may we listen to the words, the life, the example and the ministry of Jesus. And may our listening open up our eyes (as it eventually does for Peter) to what it means to live as God's faithful people today.

Amen?

Amen!



BUT THE SYMBOLISM IS PRETTY CLEAR. JESUS IS THE ENDURING *WORD OF GOD*, PROCLAIMED THROUGH DEATH ALL THE WAY TO RESURRECTION.

TAK RAPHAEL



ⁱ The Transfiguration had three parallels: Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Peter 1:16-18; and Deuteronomy 18:15.