

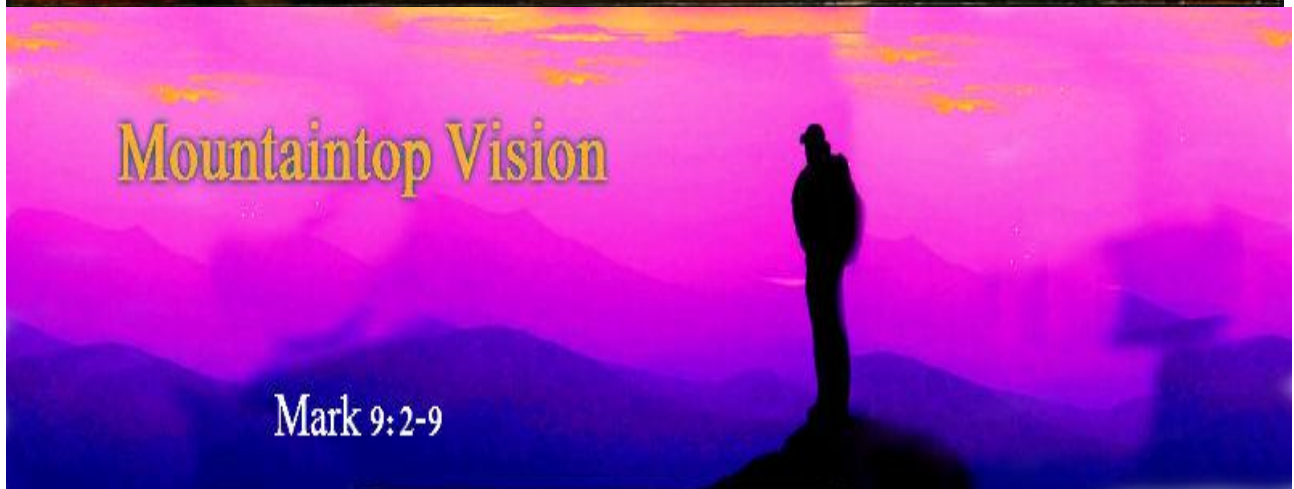
SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 15, 2015

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i
United Church of Christ – Transfiguration Sunday

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:1-12; **Mark 9:2-9**

Message: *"Seeing Glimpses of God in Jesus & in
Faithful People Around Us!"*

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GATHERING IN THE WORD OF GOD

What is a transfigured life? Today's readings are about glory and transformation! The readings invite to see our worlds as "*thin places*," those places that are transparent to the divine. Jesus' transfiguration happens in one such "*thin place*." Historically—mountaintops are seen as places of revelation, surprise, and eye-openers. Jesus' transfiguration invites us all to look for "more" in ourselves and others. There are angels and revelations around us all the time—it's a matter of seeing and understanding; as well as seeing it in others too!

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

1st Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-14 (The VOICE Bible)

2 Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal when the Eternal One planned to snatch Elijah up into the heavens by *the power of* a fierce dancing wind.

Elijah (*to Elisha*): ² I ask you to remain here. The Eternal has commanded me to go all the way to Bethel.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

So the two men traveled down to Bethel together, ³ where Elisha was approached by the prophets' disciples who lived there.

Prophets' Disciples: Are you aware that the Eternal One is going to snatch *Elijah*, your mentor, away from you today?

Elisha: Yes, I am aware *of this*. *I want you to keep quiet about it.*

Elijah (to Elisha): ⁴ I beg you to remain here. The Eternal has commanded me to travel to Jericho.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

The two men then traveled to Jericho together, ⁵ where the prophets' disciples living in Jericho approached Elisha.

Prophets' Disciples: Are you aware that the Eternal One is going to snatch your mentor away from you today?

Elisha: Yes, I am aware *of this*. I want you to keep quiet about it.

Elijah (to Elisha): ⁶ I beg you to remain here. The Eternal One has commanded me to travel to the Jordan *River*.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

So the two men then traveled *to the Jordan River* together.

⁷ While Elijah and Elisha were standing near the Jordan *River*, 50 of the prophets' disciples *from that area* stood at a distance from them on the other side. ⁸ Elijah removed his cloak and rolled it up; then he struck the water with it, and the water divided. Elijah and Elisha then walked across on dry land. ⁹ After the two had made it to the other side *of the Jordan*, Elijah spoke to Elisha.

Elijah: Tell me what it is you would like me to do for you before I am taken away from you.

Elisha: Please, I wish to receive a double portion of your spirit. *As your successor, I want to have twice the portion of your power.*

Elijah: ¹⁰ What you have requested of me is challenging, but it will be done if you witness my departure. But if you do not watch, then you will not have your double portion.

¹¹ Now as the two continued walking along and talking *as they normally did, something incredible happened. A blazing chariot pulled by blazing horses stormed down from the heavens and* came between Elijah and Elisha. Then Elijah was swept up into heaven by the *fiery* storm.

¹² Elisha witnessed this *amazing spectacle.*

Elisha: My father, O my father! The chariots and riders of Israel!

¹³⁻¹⁴ He picked up Elijah's cloak, which had dropped *to the ground when he was taken up into heaven,* and then he went back to the Jordan riverbank and stood. He struck the water with the cloak.

Elisha: Where is the Eternal One? Where is Elijah's True God?

After Elisha struck the water, the *Jordan* River divided, *just as when Elijah had struck the waters.* Elisha then walked across *on dry land.*

Elijah and Enoch (Genesis 5:24) are the only two men in the Bible to leave earth while they are still alive. Although they are separated by centuries of time, both men are inseparable from God, and both leave quite a legacy: Elijah's successor, Elisha, continues his mentor's work, even calling out Elijah's name for help. Enoch's son, Methuselah, lives longer than anyone else ever has,

which is proof that he, too, lives properly. Elisha never saw Elijah again. Elisha grabbed the clothes he was wearing, and he ripped them in half.

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This story in 2 Kings 2 is about the transfer of the prophetic office from Elijah to Elisha. Elisha has a hard time understanding that Elijah is leaving him. In the end it takes the chariots of fire from YAHWEH GOD that finally separates the two—Elisha has been sticking like glue to Elijah up to that point! So Elijah departs in a spectacular way—never to be seen again until the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2-9) nearly 1,000 years later!

It is true that both of the men that appeared with Jesus in Mark 9 were not only the key Old Testament prophets and leaders but both of them had been whisked and taken away in a “non-standard fashion” by God (*Moses from Mount Nebo and Elijah in this chariot of fire*).

So what’s the point of this story?

- The story takes place outside the ordinary.
- This is not typical or the kind of story that we would expect to ever happen again.
- We witness (through the Bible) and experience God’s divine and the unexpected around us.
- Also, we know that God is always at work around us and that the power of God that saves the world and cares for God’s people and all of creation is always present and always active even today in February 2015!

2nd Reading: Mark 9:2-9 (The VOICE Bible)

² Six days after saying this, Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up onto a high mountaintop by themselves. There He was transformed ³ so that His clothing became intensely white, brighter than any earthly cleaner could bleach them. ⁴ Elijah and Moses appeared to them and talked with Jesus.

Peter (to Jesus): ⁵ Teacher, it's a great thing that we're here. We should build three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

⁶ He Peter *was babbling and* did not know what he was saying because they were terrified *by what they were witnessing*.

⁷ Then a cloud surrounded them, and they heard a voice within that cloud.

Voice: This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.

⁸ All of a sudden, they looked about and all they had seen was gone. They stood alone on the mountain with Jesus.

⁹ On their way back down, He urged them not to tell anyone what they had witnessed until the Son of Man had risen from the dead,

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In our Mark 9 lesson is the climax and the best moment of one of the Bible's grandest visual light shows of glory—God the Father comes and advises the disciples to—

“Listen to Jesus!” This is not what we would expect. Peter had correctly identified Jesus as the Christ of God—the other gospel writers assure us that Peter was mightily blessed by Jesus on account that Peter knew the right answer to the question: “*Who do you say that I am?*” Peter got it right but behind his good answer was a lot of confused thinking and wrong-headed definitions as what was Christhood and Messiahship. Peter had stars in his eyes—or at least in his imagination—as he confirmed that Jesus was the Christ!

The disciples argued as to who was the greatest among them (9:33) and then James and John asked for the top two cabinet posts in the upcoming Jesus Administration (Mark 10:35ff)—which tell us that they had not listened to Jesus’ words or if they had listened—they had not taken the words seriously—much less to heart!

So God puts in an appearance, throws some divine razzle-dazzle (*showiness designed to be impressive and exciting*) and brings in two *heavyweights* from Israel’s past to back up everything that Jesus has ever said. In fact, not long after this incident, the disciples would see something else before which they’d cower, cringe, and tremble—they’d see their friend Jesus impaled on a spit on wood at the Place of the Skull (Golgotha). Even on that dark day the key activity would be the same: **don’t go with what your eyes show you—listen to Jesus!**

Listen!

“It is accomplished!”

Listen!

DOING THE WORD OF GOD

So what is God's Word for us on this Transfiguration Sunday?

1. ONE: WHEN WE ARE WITH JESUS—WE ARE NEVER ALONE!

We are always in the company of a great host—a great cloud of witnesses! Our family and others we grew up in Church! Our family is always around us; our ancestors are too!

With Jesus—the Father and the Holy Spirit are always with him and great glory is never far away!

So—be the presence of our Lord Jesus to others around you! You have the gifts, the wherewithal, the means, the ability, and the resources! We all do! But when we work together—amazing things happen!

2. TWO: WE DO AND WILL ENCOUNTER GOD IN OUR LIVES ALL THE TIME!

Yet—because we do experience God in our lives all the time—we will simultaneously fear the presence of God because we fear being changed and being transformed. So when God comes to us—maybe not in an transfiguration as Mark—but in our ordinary hopes, encounters, in the death of our loved ones, and even the tragedies of our everyday life—when God comes and unsettles the orderly lives we've constructed we try to put those disruptive

experiences back into line by cramming them into our own plan!

Everyone here this morning has space to experience—let alone everyone else’s—into a “divine plan,” rather to allow each other space to experience the wonder and mystery of God!

Our God is there in and around us always! Always!

**3.THREE: BECAUSE JESUS IS OUR LORD—
EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT NOW. WE HAVE
JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLS AND
LIVES IN US—24-7!**

So we see life and people and things differently through God’s eyes because of our faith and because we are ‘ohana--family! So let us learn and live to be in the presence of God every day!

Prayer changes things, including people’s health outcomes and to provide healing, comfort and overall well-being.

All things are possible! All things!

Share this good news with others around you!

SENDING IN THE WORD OF GOD

Even on all kinds of days when the disciples and Jesus were by no means having a mountaintop experience and when dazzling and blazing clothes were whiter than white were nowhere to be seen; even when Jesus smiled kindly

at lepers, look pained to see a “sinner” being shunned by the Temple establishment or looked pleasant and charming after telling a hurting prostitute to go in peace because her sins were forgiven—there was a sense in which the disciples were seeing the face of God! They were seeing hints of glory! They were seeing true God of true God—vividly and surprisingly and, yes—dazzlingly on display in God’s One and Only Son—full of grace and truth!

And this happens today—maybe quietly as well as dazzling! Hmmmmmmmmmmm!

THANKS BE TO GOD! ALLELUIA! AMEN!