Out of the Ordinary

Luke 9:28-36 Kimby Young

Exodus 34:29-35 March 2, 2025

What makes a remarkable day? I’ll let you think about that for a minute. What makes a day ordinary and what makes a day extraordinary? Some are easy to identify. Christmas, Easter, birthdays, anniversaries, starting a new job, starting school, graduating. Also perhaps days when something difficult happens – surgery, death of a loved one, an accident, losing a job. These are eventful days, days set apart. Sometimes they are planned. Sometimes they don’t turn out the way we planned. Sometimes they are unplanned, unexpected and maybe even unwanted. What makes a remarkable day?

In the scripture for today – both scripture passages – started out as ordinary days. In the gospel, just another day, when Jesus takes his best friends up a mountain to pray. He did this thousands of times. Jesus prayed many times a day. More times than we can count, Jesus stepped apart from the crowds and hiked up a mountain to get away. That day Peter, James and John probably thought – just another day. But in that mysterious marvelous moment on the mountain, something changed. They saw a vision revealing something extraordinary about Jesus. Figures of Moses and Elijah joined Jesus in prayer, a cloud descended, a voice from heaven spoke. Suddenly this was not your ordinary nature hike. Understandably the disciples didn’t know what to do. Peter wanted to set up worship tents. Maybe he wanted to stay there forever. They wanted to hold on to this moment of wonder, this revelation from God, this revelation about Jesus. But the moment passes, the cloud goes by, and the disciples head back down the mountain, not knowing what to say about what just happened. So they didn’t say anything. They kept silent. And they remembered.

Back to my first question of the sermon. What makes a remarkable day? What makes another day ordinary? Is TODAY remarkable or ordinary? It’s just another Sunday – a time to worship God. It’s communion Sunday – the first Sunday of March. It’s also Women’s Sunday – set apart by the Presbyterian Church. Liturgically and theologically, it is Transfiguration Sunday. It is the day of the church year when we remember the transfiguration of Jesus - this very odd symbolic mystical experience from the gospels. Transfiguration Sunday is the last Sunday before Lent begins on Ash Wednesday.

Lent is a time when we traditionally, more intentionally, seek the presence of God, when we try to understand mystery and miracle, when we hope to experience Holiness in some profound way. Lent is a whole collection of ordinary days in which we recognize that God can transform the ordinary into the miraculous. In fact God does offer miraculous moments every single day. Sometimes we notice the everyday miracles, and sometimes we don’t. The challenge of Lent is to recognize the extraordinary, the holy, the wondrous – to recognize God with us even in ordinary random unspectacular moments and days. The challenge is to seek God and to see Jesus every single day. Look for God’s miracles of grace.

Perhaps that is why this transfiguration story is remembered every single year on the Sunday before Lent. As odd as this little story is, I think it is one that is strangely appealing, especially to the people of our world today. People are looking for God. In our culture, the prevalence of references to spirituality, the appeal of the supernatural, the deep desire for something more, and the abundance and diversity of religious options all point to a society that is desperately seeking the divine. We want to go up on a mountain to find bright lights and glowing figures. We want to be immersed in a cloud of mystery and otherness. We want to be found by one who is greater and more spectacular than we can imagine. We want to be transfigured and transformed by the amazing revelation of God. Perhaps because the ordinary every day seems somehow lacking.

And yet, like the disciples, when something happens to confirm our awareness of God; when God calls, when God touches us, when God moves our Spirits and stirs our actions, we hardly know how to respond. We certainly have trouble sharing our religious experiences and telling others about our faith. We often don't know how to talk about our relationship with God, and we frequently don't understand what to do to live out that relationship in the world in our regular daily lives. Life is full of choices. And sometimes we just don't know what God would have us do next, or how to live the way we think God is calling us to live. Sometimes we would love to have a mountaintop revelation.

In this scripture passage – we can definitely identify with the bumbling disciples. Much like Peter – we have never been able to "capture" the experience of a miraculous spiritual moment and hold on to it. Peter wanted to make shelters and live there in that holy moment forever. I understand the desire. If you've ever had a moment when you absolutely knew the presence of God, when you felt that warmth and blessing, when you were lifted up into mystery and promise and possibility and commitment …maybe in a worship service, or on a retreat, or doing a mission project, or in a hospital room, or on a mountaintop or ocean-side or garden… if you've ever had a spiritual moment like that, then you know - you want to hold on to it forever. But you know also that it passes all too quickly. And if you've never had such a moment, if you've never been quite sure of God's love or even God's reality, but you are here now seeking, you are wanting to know God, you are wanting to understand… well, maybe you understand this scripture even more fully. What would you give for an experience like the disciples had here – a clear revelation of God's mystery and majesty, God's power and presence, God's overwhelming magnificence and glory? Oh, for such a moment.

So here's the message for us today – even though we know Jesus to be the risen Son of God, the Word made flesh, God dwelling among us; even though we know Jesus to be Savior of the World and our own personal friend and redeemer; even though we know God loves us and the Spirit is with us; even though we are blessed and we have been given gifts by God; even though all of this is true – we will still have ordinary days in an ordinary world. We will still have good days and bad, make bad decisions and good ones, have clear understandings and confused questioning. We will still walk hand in hand with Jesus, and may not be quite sure where we are going next. We will come down from the mountain and live our lives in the ordinary days, by the grace of God. That doesn't mean we don't keep looking for the mountaintop. That just means that we look for God in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. Notice God in the quiet moment, as well as the flashy fire and wind. The mystery of God's presence can be even more overwhelming, when God sneaks up to you in that mundane moment of daily living. Think about that – God sitting beside you right now. Christ walking with you wherever you walk tomorrow. Notice the mystery, and be blessed.

So Lent begins this Wednesday. We will mark the day with evening worship and you are invited to join us. You may remember each day using the Lenten devotion books. Maybe you'll give up something as a reminder to be faithful to God. Maybe you'll add a spiritual discipline like prayer or Bible study or service to others. Whatever you do this season of Lent, be intentional about seeking God. Be intentional about serving others. Be intentional about sharing your faith. For forty ordinary days plus six Sundays, seek God's transformation. Seek God's revelation. Seek God's gift. And be blessed by God’s amazing grace. Amen.

March 2 2025

Luke 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but as they awoke they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,” not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face, but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off until he came out, and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining, and Moses would put the veil on his face again until he went in to speak with him.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.