

Mark 9:2-9

Preached for Stone Church of Willow Glen via Zoom by Rev. Samantha Evans

February 14, 2021

You Are Loved

Good morning, my sweet friends, and happy Valentine's Day. My hope for you this day is that despite everything that is going on in the world and in your lives, that you know without a doubt that you are loved.

As Mary Jo said, our God loves us without measure and without exception. Our God is so deeply in love with us and with all of Creation, and because of that, God is deeply committed to tending to Creation, to caring for all the world, to caring for us.

And not only that, God is committed to teaching and guiding us to do the same, even though we constantly get it wrong, mess up, and forget what we're supposed to be doing. God never stops calling us back, tending our wounds, and putting us back on the paths of righteousness and justice, love and joy, paths that lead to healing for ourselves and for everyone.

Friends, today is Transfiguration Sunday, which as Pastor Irene says, is the day we marvel at the fact that Jesus glows in the dark!

It's also always the last Sunday before Lent begins. I would say that at least one reason for this is that it sets us up to see Jesus as the Christ, the divine Son of God, an authoritative voice to listen to, a worthy figure to follow, for Lent is a time to listen to and follow Jesus on his way to the cross.

Lent is a time to do some serious work and discernment, to seek to peel back the things that get in the way of our relationship with God, and one another, and with ourselves. It is time to grow and change and evolve. And we all know that is hard, grueling work that we don't always want to do, so we pause this final Sunday to kind of receive Jesus' credential. This is the Beloved, the disembodied voice from heaven says, listen to him! He's legit, do what he says.

There's something else here, though, that feels important. As I sat with the story this week, I just couldn't stop wondering about why Jesus took Peter, James, and John up that mountain to begin with. He usually went by himself, to get some time away, to rest and pray and recharge. As a side note: I also am choosing to believe that every Jesus went away to pray, he was hanging out with Elijah and Moses. They were all just sitting around a fire telling stories and laughing at all the crazy stuff God asks them to do.

But this time, Jesus decided to take his sweet, little mortal buddies along. And though this episode does serve to give Jesus some extra divine authority. It makes a good case for why his disciples should follow him down this mountain and to the cross, but his baptism basically did the same thing.

So what else is happening here?

I think Jesus took his buddies up this mountain, so that they could learn the essential truth that God desires to simply dwell with God's people. Jesus invites his friends up onto that mountain because that is where Jesus has felt incredible belonging and peace. That is where Jesus has been reminded and recharged. That is where Jesus has dwelled with God and discovered and rediscovered his worthiness and belovedness, and so he desired his friends to know and feel all of that too.

God sees us as worthy and beloved simply because we exist. There's nothing we can do or not do to change this. As the apostle Paul says, there is nothing in all of Creation that can separate us from the love of God. And we invited to dwell in the presence of God, regardless of what we are able (or not able) to bring or do.

We are worthy. Full stop. No caveat, no if/then statement. We are just worthy. We are just beloved. We are just children of God, before we even know what that could mean.

This statement is so simple, so potentially self-evident, and yet, we fail to remember and live into it all the time. I relate so deeply to Peter, and I know that many of you do too.

Finding himself in the presence of the divine and his most important ancestors, Peter tries to get to work. Let me build you a dwelling, he exclaims! Nervous and terrified, and trying to justify his presence on that mountain, he says, "It's good that I am here, let me get to work."

Now, I know that many of us grew up thinking just like Peter, that we have to prove our worth. That we have to do something or offer something to make us worthy of being where we are. We've been taught that we are worthy if we never have to ask for help, but are always available to help those around us.

Growing up, this was glorified as the "Protestant Work Ethic." And it has different names and takes different forms in other cultures and contexts.

As we read, Peter fell victim to this way of thinking way before Protestantism was even a thing. But it was as important then as it is now, that we see this kind of thinking for what it is: a lie, a sin, a way of thinking and behaving, which separates us from our God and one another ... even our very selves.

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I had a friend this week say that she resented the fact that we don't get miracles like these. The disciples saw healing and exorcisms, they got to see Jesus glowing in the dark. But we don't get any of that! And my friend is annoyed by that. She exclaimed that she wishes Jesus would just show up in her living room, all glorified and glowing, like he did for Peter, James, and John.

And I think it's funny to imagine how we might react if that did indeed happen ... and I feel almost certain that each and every one of us would just into total host mode. What can I get you to drink? Are you hungry? Please take a seat. Can I get you a blanket? Sorry about the mess. Let me just tidy up and you make yourself at home.

It is good that we are here. Let me do something to prove I am worthy of this.

Y'all know it's true. So this day, we are invited to simply dwell in the presence of God. To believe in our worthiness and our belovedness, regardless of what we have done or left undone this week.

And as we prepare for our Lenten journey, we are invited to consider how this gift enables us to travel back down the mountain, to extend love and care, to serve and be served, but not from a place of insecurity or need to prove ourselves.

We are moved to give from a place of awe and gratitude for God's freely given gift of love and belonging. We are invited to love and serve the way God loves and serves us.

In the name of the Triune God, who creates, sustains, and redeems us all. Amen.