

February 14, 2021 | Sanctuary Worship Service

TEXT: [Mark 9:2–10](#)

TITLE: **Good to be Here**

By the Rev. Dr. Randy Bush

A whole lot of things happened in the story we just heard—symbolic things, important things. Jesus is up on a mountaintop, which calls to mind the mountain upon which God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Speaking of Moses, he was there too—and the dazzling white clothes are another reminder of that time on Mount Sinai. And if all that wasn't enough, Elijah was there as well—the one who'd been whisked off to heaven in a golden chariot, the last of the great prophets. Jesus, Moses, Elijah, dazzling raiment, a mountaintop setting, a cloud overshadowing them, a voice calling out “Listen to him!” Then, the entire vision was swept away—gone in a flash.

It was a lot for Peter, James and John to process. Scripture even comments that they were terrified and didn't know what to say. But good ol' Peter breaks the silence. He manages to stammer out a short sentence of hospitality—“Rabbi, it is good for us to be here.” Good thing we are here. Little did he realize how true those words actually were.

The main focus of the Transfiguration event comes from what happened with Jesus. His glowing robe, the conversation with Moses and Elijah—it all points to how in him the divine and human realms come together. It emphasizes that God's will for us becomes clear when we listen to Jesus and follow as he leads. But how exactly does this happen? To answer that question, we need to turn our gaze away from Jesus' glowing white robes and focus instead on the simple garments of the three ex-fishermen and their surprised dumbstruck faces up on that mountain long ago.

First Transfiguration Lesson: Although Jesus likes working one-on-one, he really loves small group ministry. There are lots of times Jesus' ministry was advanced because of a single person: the boy whose lunch of bread and fish was used to feed a crowd of 5,000; the Samaritan woman at the well, who learned about the water of life and told that news to the entire village. But ultimately Jesus seems to prefer small groups. When he sent out his disciples to proclaim the good news in neighboring villages, he sent them out in pairs. When he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead or on this day went up the mountaintop to meet with Moses and Elijah, he brought three disciples with him. Scripture even says, “Where two or three are gathered, I am there.” (Mt 18:20)

It's like Jesus wants us to work in committees! Think about it—how many times in a committee meeting has a new idea emerged because someone around the table spoke up? And how often is this insight only possible when the faces around the table are diverse in gender, race, age, and experience? Something about God's plans relies on small groups—not the uniform bubbles created by social media logarithms, but the diverse fellowship created by God's Holy Spirit. So an important part of following Jesus means signing up to follow Jesus with others.

Second Transfiguration Lesson: God's strategy is a simple one—each generation needs to teach the next generation. Everyone needs a strategy for success. There was once a large family reunion in which the children were going to challenge the adults to a game of softball. The kids all huddled together and one of them suggested, "Let's hit a lot of grounders. Grown-ups can't bend." Sure enough, the kids won that day. That particular strategy exploited a weakness to gain victory. God's strategy relies on a strength—our love for our children, our desire to pass on to the next generation the wisdom we've gained in our lives.

Jesus could have met with Moses and Elijah anytime; he could have held a secret gathering far from the eyes of others. But instead the transfiguration intentionally happened in front of Peter, James and John, so they would see and remember and in time tell others about it. Jesus actually wants us around. In John 17:24, Jesus literally prays, "*God, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory...so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*" The resurrected Jesus appeared to the women at the tomb so they would tell others. The gospels were written so that what had been seen and believed could be passed on to the next generation. Jesus wants us around so we'll tell others, by words and deeds, who we hang around with—who is our light, our hope, our Lord.

Which leads to the third and most important Transfiguration lesson: there are times in our lives in which we too will say exactly what Peter said: "It is good to be here." Long ago, back in the 1600s, someone warned King Charles II of England that if ever the ravens left the Tower of London, the British Empire would collapse. So to this day they make sure at least six ravens freely roost and live on the grounds of the Tower of London. In a similar way, there is an old Jewish legend that says that every generation contains 36 righteous people, who together are just enough to ensure that God will not destroy the world. These righteous ones, called Tzadikim, don't know one another nor are they famous in the eyes of the world. It could be you, or me, the person next to you, or the driver of the car in front of you. This idea should fill us with humility, since the world's fate rests upon the moral actions of unsung saints somewhere in the world; which means we have to protect one another, for woe be upon us if by our actions the world drops below the survival threshold of 36 Tzadikim.

I tell that story as an indirect way to respond to the question: Why are we here? That's a perennial question for all of us. It is one commonly asked if you've had a brush with death, if you've recovered from a serious illness, or if loved ones and peers have died even as you awaken each morning to a new day. Part of the answer to that question comes when we approach it from a different angle. Instead of asking "Why am I here?" our faith prompts us to ask ourselves, "When have I said 'It is good I was here?'" I'm not thinking of heroic moments, but simple moments—like when you were able to sit with a friend in pain, drive someone to a doctor's appointment, or offer a listening ear and a quiet word of advice. I'm thinking of times when you did your job well, when your expertise righted a wrong or moved us all one step closer to a larger goal. "It is good I was here" may be on your mind when you spend time laughing with good friends, when

you speak a vow to another person and really mean it, when you notice someone on the margins and you invite them to join the group.

The wonderful spiritual teacher Joan Chittister once wrote that “the only purpose of the spiritual life is to begin to see the world as God sees the world. It is about becoming the self that sees life through the eyes of Jesus and then, like Jesus, bends to become the miracle the world awaits.” (In God's Holy Spirit) We are to bend to become the miracle the world awaits—to lift up someone who's fallen; to speak up for someone long silenced; for insisting that the history of people of color has been erased and silenced for too long and needs to be heard, honored, and remembered; for knowing that we have spent far too much money on learning how to destroy life and it is high time we focused on preserving life.

On that mountaintop, Peter was overwhelmed, even terrified, and didn't know what to say. So he humbly offered a word of hospitality, saying “It is good for us to be here.” That is a powerful phrase of encouragement, and by faith it should be our mantra every morning when we open our eyes. For in those words, the three Transfiguration lessons come together. 1) Peter said, “It is good for us to be here”—first person plural. Jesus loves small groups. Whatever needs to be done in this life is likely something to be done together. 2) Peter addressed his comments to Jesus, saying “It is good to be here”—to be with you, to see this revelation that we might be your witnesses to the world and pass on this gospel to the generations yet to come. And 3) lastly, Peter named a fundamental fact about life—“It is good to be here”, to be alive, to be a Tzadik, a righteous soul, someone trying their best for the sake of the world today and a beloved kingdom tomorrow, to be a follower of the one who is truth, love, and abundant life, now and forever.

On this Valentine's Day, on this moment in Black History month, on this Lord's Day, it is good for us to be here. We were never intended to stay up on mountaintops. We were meant to be right here—journeying down the paths of life, in this community, walking with Christ and praying, “Lord, guide my feet for I don't want to run this race in vain.” Peter didn't know what to say but in the end, he said precisely the right thing. When we feel like Peter, trust that with Christ, it is always good to be here.

AMEN