

Sermon for February 7, 2016
Luke 9:28-43a

Today is Transfiguration Sunday and this year we hear Luke's version of this event. Some of you may be wondering what the second half of our Gospel reading has to do with the first part. As we read about Jesus' changed appearance, the visit with Moses and Elijah, and hear the voice from the clouds; we can see the connection to the day. But what has the disciples not being able to heal a possessed boy have to do with Jesus and his glory?

The writer of Luke's Gospel is extremely interested in the life and worship of his community. From the beginning of his Gospel Luke is interested in inviting the community (represented by the person of Theophilus) to engage deeper with their faith. Luke states that he is writing so that they may be confident of the things they have already heard and learned. Luke is writing for people who have heard the faith and believe what they have heard, but they want a greater understanding of what they have learned. So Luke is teaching.

At the end of Luke's story he narrates a scene with Jesus and the two disciples on their way to Emmaus that lays out the nature of the four parts of Christian worship. In worship the first thing we do is to gather. Jesus meets the disciples on the road and draws them into conversation. Then we hear the word. Jesus begins with Moses and all the prophets as he interprets the Scriptures for them. Next we have the meal. The disciples invite Jesus to stay with them and he is revealed to them through the breaking of the bread. And lastly we are sent. After realizing who was with them; the disciples rush all the way back to Jerusalem to share the good news with the other disciples.

Luke is promising us that worship is where we will see Jesus and have our hearts burn with the good news.

We get the same sort of thing now in the middle of Luke's Gospel—an instruction on the nature of worship. Luke is the only Gospel writer to note that Jesus was going up the mountain to pray. And his going happened to be on the eighth day after his discussion with the disciples on what will happen to him when he gets to Jerusalem. The eighth day became very early in the Christian church a way to refer to Sunday, the day of the resurrection and worship, the first day of the new week and time.

While there Jesus discusses with Moses and Elijah his upcoming crucifixion. And this time the voice from heaven is not directed at Jesus, but at the disciples with the command to listen to him. While this isn't the clear pattern of worship that we get in the Emmaus story, the combination of prayer, discussion focused on the cross, and the command to listen all taking place on the eighth day can stir up our imagination to vision what Sunday can be like.

Which is why the second half of the Gospel reading is so important—the retreat to worship and the time to listen to the Word, to be immersed in the cross, and to be gathered in prayer leads us back out into the “everyday world” of human need where Jesus heals the sick and opposes the forces of evil. While worship is a retreat; it isn't a retreat from the world, but a retreat in order to come back to the world with love, mercy and grace.

Worship is meant to be a moment of reflection, of immersion, of fellowship, and of prayer in order that we may embrace our callings to the world to respond to the needs of God's beloved sons and daughters with renewed energy and confidence. Worship is

not just a time to come because we think we should. It isn't a time just to hear and sing the hymns that mean so much to us. It's not just a time to slow down the hectic pace of our lives. Worship can be so much more. It can be the place where we hear God's voice, focus on the nature of grace found in the cross, uphold each other in prayer and song and then leave renewed with a purpose in our life for service to our neighbor.

In closing today I want to leave you with a story about a young couple and their view of worship and the church. Whenever one of them couldn't make it to church—for instance if one of their children was sick—they'd do a quick two-minute drill to check in on the week they'd just been through and the week about to come to determine, as they said, "who needed church more." "Church is what helps us make sense of our lives," they explained, "it's that pick-me-up that connects us with God and our calling and sends up back into the week."

We have that same opportunity each and every week to be reminded that we are God's beloved sons and daughters, that God has in Jesus' cross and resurrection shown us just how much God loves us and that this love conquers everything, and has called and equipped us to make a difference in the lives of those all around us—just as our mission statement reads—to show God's love to our neighbors near and far.