

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Open your eyes to the glory of God.  
All: **We look for a vision to claim our souls.**  
One: We have come to share knowledge of Jesus Christ.  
All: **Let us open our ears to the good news of the gospel.**  
Unison: **We gather, seeking transformation and empowerment.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** “Lead On, O Cloud of Presence” StF 2234 (*Tune 269*)

- 1. Lead on, O cloud of Presence, the exodus is come,  
in wilderness and desert our tribe shall make its home.  
Our slavery left behind us, new hopes within us grow.  
We seek the land of promise where milk and honey flow.**
- 2. Lead on, O fiery Pillar, we follow yet with fears,  
but we shall come rejoicing though joy be born of tears.  
We are not lost, though wand’ring, for by your light we come,  
and we are still God’s people. The journey is our home.**
- 3. Lead on, O God of freedom, and guide us on our way,  
and help us trust the promise through struggle and delay.  
We pray our sons and daughters may journey to that land  
where justice dwells with mercy, and love is law’s demand.**

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## UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We have seen your glory, O Lord, but falter in following. We have heard your word, but turn away. You promise renewal, but we heed not your wisdom. We bow to the gods of this world, choosing to hide from your truth. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us. Look tenderly upon us with your grace and forgive us our foolhardiness. Encourage our timid hearts. Strengthen our faith. Restore us, and transform us so that our lives may shine with your glory, beauty, and grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## SILENT CONFESSION

### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: The Lord is indeed a God of mercy and compassion. We know this for certain because of Jesus Christ.

All: **In Christ, God seeks the lost and forgives the sinner and loves the world.**

One: So let us hear and believe this wonderful, good news.

All: **That in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. In Jesus Christ we are loved. Alleluia! Amen!**

## THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)*

## THE WORD

### SCRIPTURE READING Mark 9:2-9

MARK 9:2-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>2</sup> Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" <sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Humankind had risen from the dead.

SCRIPTURE HYMN “Transform Us” StF 2153 (*Tune 347*)

**1. Transform us as you, transfigured,  
stood apart on Tabor’s height.  
Lead us up our sacred mountains,  
search us with revealing light.  
Lift us from where we have fallen,  
full of questions, filled with fright.**

**2. Transform us as you, transfigured,  
once spoke with those holy ones.  
We, surrounded by the witness  
of those saints whose work is done,  
live in this world as your Body,  
chosen daughters, chosen sons.**

**3. Transform us as you, transfigured,  
would not stay within a shrine.  
Keep us from our great temptation –  
time and truth we quickly bind.  
Lead us down those daily pathways  
where our love is not confined.**

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**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** “Up the Mountain!” by Pastor Bill Vincent

The Transfiguration: it’s a little weird; kind of bizarre. Almost feels like a ‘smoke and mirrors’ display.

Yet it is an obvious affirmation of Jesus' honor and glory, and confirmation of his identity: who he is. Yes!

Filled with imagery and allusions.

\*“*led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.*” – the mountain as a place of revelation.

\*“*he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white*” – reminiscent of the time Moses came down the mountain from talking with God, and his face shone from being in the presence of God (see Exodus 34:29).

\*Moses, representing the law of God.

\*Elijah, representing the prophetic tradition.

\*“*Then a cloud overshadowed them*” – reminiscent of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night: God leading the people through the wilderness (see Exodus 13:21-22).

\*Then the voice, using almost the exact same words as at Jesus’ baptism: “*This is my Son, the Beloved*’.” The Son of God, in whom we see the glory of God at its fullest (cf. John 1:14). The one anointed as the instrument of God's presence and power.

But even with all this – the affirmation of Jesus’ honor and glory, and his identity...though that’s plenty – even with all this, I think there is more to this passage.

The song has it right:

**Transform us as you, transfigured...**

(“Transform Us,” words by Sylvia G. Dunstan)

Not only is Jesus transfigured, but this story holds out the possibility – the hope – that we, too, can be transfigured, transformed.

How?

*“He was transfigured”* – the passive voice. Not a big deal. A small detail.

Yet very often the biblical writers use the passive voice as a circumspect way of referring to God's activity.

*“He was transfigured.”* Divine action, not human ability or capability. God did it. God's initiative. God's possibility...not ours.

This transformation. This transfiguration. The Greek word is “metamorphosis” – think butterfly.

Can it happen? Will it happen?

It can – by God's working, by God's grace.

Now, yes, there is much we can do to help it along. Much we need to do to be part of it, to work together with the process. Whatever the issue may be in play: membership, finances; fear, openness to change; direction, focus.

We may need to admit we don't know.

And commit to finding out.

We may need to admit we’re not sure how.

And commit to giving it a try.

Like Peter, James, and John, the mountain of our transfiguration is there.

But we don’t go it alone. Remember? Jesus invites us to go up with him.

We need to be willing to go, to say Yes, to make the effort to climb the mountain. And I won't lie to you, it's a huge mountain. Mountains are not easy to climb.

But it's Jesus who invites us to follow.

And with that story about his transfiguration – with all that imagery and all those allusions confirming for us who he really is – that's why we follow him: because he is who he is.

That's why we follow.

That's why we admit we don't know and commit to finding out.

That's why we admit we're not sure and commit to giving it a try.

Because it's Jesus who invites us to follow.

It's Jesus who invites us up the mountain.

It's Jesus who invites us to be transfigured.

Because it's Jesus who shows us that the possibility to be transformed exists, no thanks to us, but all thanks to God.

It's not easy, this transformation.

Note the context of our passage.

Before: with the first passion prediction and words about the cost of discipleship: "Take up your cross" "Lose your life." That's hard to hear. It's harder still to live.

After: when Jesus and Peter and James and John go down the mountain and are confronted by a father with a sick son whom the other disciples fail to heal, because, Jesus says, *"This kind can come out only through prayer"* (Mark 9:28). Matthew has Jesus say, *"Because of your little faith"* (Matthew 17:20).

Faith, prayer – we can't do anything without them.

Now, yes, eventually, the disciples will be transformed, fickle and fallible though they may be. Eventually, the disciples will make it up the mountain of their own transfiguration and transformation.

But it will take time. For one thing, there is the need for the crucifixion and resurrection in order to complete Jesus' word and work. Even then the transformation doesn't happen overnight – or even in a single year. It will take time.

And it will take effort...and sacrifice. It will cost them a cross...and a life.

And they will make many mistakes along the way and fall many times.

But they keep going and do not give up. And Jesus does not give up on them, either.

So that in the presence and with the companionship of Christ, they know forgiveness from their mistakes, healing from their brokenness.

In the presence and with the companionship of Christ, they know a second chance, and that more than once.

In the presence and with the companionship of Christ, they know guidance when they are lost, and encouragement when they fall.

In the presence and with the companionship of Christ, they know a strength beyond their own, and so know a hope and possibility beyond themselves.

And we can, too.

It takes faith and prayer. Faith: that trust that God will see us through. Prayer: to share our questions, and to listen for instruction.

It takes our time. For it won't happen overnight, or even in a single year.

It takes our effort and sacrifice; energy, commitment, focus.

And we will make mistakes. But we learn from them.

And we keep going and don't give up.

For in Jesus Christ we know forgiveness and a second chance, encouragement and guidance, strength and hope.

A strength beyond our own. A hope beyond self.  
And isn't that what transformation is all about?

So we climb this mountain of transfiguration – transformation – not on our own, or alone,  
But with Jesus: the Son of God who embodies the glory of God; the one anointed as the instrument of God's presence and power in our midst, and in us.

Listening to him and following him...for life.

**\*HYMN** “We Have Come at Christ’s Own Bidding” GtG 191 (*Tune 260*)

**1. We have come at Christ’s own bidding  
to this high and holy place,  
where we wait with hope and longing  
for some token of God’s grace.  
Here we pray for new assurance  
that our faith is not in vain,  
searching like those first disciples  
for a sign both clear and plain.**

**2. Light breaks through our clouds and shadows;  
splendor bathes the flesh-joined Word;  
Moses and Elijah marvel  
as the heavenly voice is heard.  
Eyes and hearts behold with wonder  
how the law and prophets meet:  
Christ, with garments drenched in brightness,  
stands transfigured and complete.**

**3. Strengthened by this glimpse of glory,  
fearful lest our faith decline,  
we like Peter find it tempting  
to remain and build a shrine.  
But true worship gives us courage  
to proclaim what we profess,  
that our daily lives may prove us  
people of the God we bless.**

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**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from “*A Declaration of Faith*”)

**The Spirit enabled people of all races, classes, and nations  
to accept the good news of what God had done in Christ,  
repent of their sins,  
and enter the community of faith.**

**The Christian fellowship was not a society of perfect people.  
The struggle between the old way of life and the new was severe.  
Yet the Spirit produced among followers of Jesus  
love, joy, peace, and victories in the battle against evil.**

**We testify that today this same Holy Spirit  
makes us able to respond in faith to the gospel  
and leads us into the Christian community.**

**The Spirit brings us out of death into life,  
out of separation into fellowship.**

**The Spirit makes us aware of our sinfulness and need,  
moves us to abandon our old way of life,  
persuades us to trust in Christ and adopt his way.**

**We believe the Holy Spirit works today  
whenever believers grow toward maturity in Christ.**

**It is not our faith but God's grace in Jesus Christ  
that justifies us and reconciles us to God.**

**Yet it is only by faith that we accept God's grace  
and live by it.**

**As long as we live we struggle with sin,  
but the Spirit's presence assures us  
God will complete what God has begun in us.**

“A Declaration of Faith” is Copyright 1977, 1991, the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); adopted (1977) “as a contemporary statement of faith, a reliable aid for Christian study, liturgy, and inspiration, with the clear understanding that” it is not approved as a part of the *Book of Confessions*.

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**One:** Lord, in your glory and your mercy...

**All:** ...hear our prayer.

**THE LORD'S PRAYER** (*Contemporary*)

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

## OFFERING

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Gracious God, we give you thanks  
for the light of love around us  
and the fire of faith within us.  
In gratitude to you,  
we offer you our all,  
bringing these offerings  
as the firstfruits of our commitment  
to you and your way.  
Let our lives reflect the One  
who is the image of your glory:  
Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.**

## SENDING

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory” GtG 190

- 1. Swiftly pass the clouds of glory,  
heaven's voice, the dazzling light;  
Moses and Elijah vanish;  
Christ alone commands the height!  
Peter, James, and John fall silent,  
turning from the summit's rise  
downward toward the shadowed valley  
where their Lord has fixed his eyes.**
- 2. Glimpsed and gone the revelation,  
they shall gain and keep its truth,  
not by building on the mountain  
any shrine or sacred booth,  
but by following the Savior  
through the valley to the cross  
and by testing faith's resilience  
through betrayal, pain, and loss.**

*(continued...)*



3. **Lord, transfigure our perception  
with the purest light that shines,  
and recast our life's intentions  
to the shape of your designs,  
till we seek no other glory  
than what lies past Calvary's hill  
and our living and our dying  
and our rising by your will.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...  
All: ...Amen.

**POSTLUDE**

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