

February 11, 2024
The Transfiguration of Our Lord
Year B
Mark 9:2-9
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Enough

I have to tell you, I'm pretty tired this morning. It's been a long week and an even longer weekend. We had the Confirmation lock-in this weekend and it was a full 22 hours of activity, including 7 hours to sleep or, at least, to rest and be quiet.

The kids had it worse than I did, though. At least I got to sleep on the couch. The kids camped out on the Founders' Room floor for their small allotment of sleep. Karen Swan, who has chaperoned many past Confirmation lock-ins, posted on Facebook that there was no sleeping going on at the lock-ins that she chaperoned. But I think that the five kids we had sleeping here last Friday night were relieved when I finally said at midnight that it was time to get ready for bed. I don't know that anyone got a great night's sleep, but I'm pretty sure that everyone got at least some sleep.

Still, I'm pretty tired. The lock-in involved a lot of activity, cooking together, doing dishes and cleaning together playing Jailbreak together, quilting together, along with the people from Emmanuel who come every week to do quilting for Lutheran World Relief, and doing Bible story lessons together playing some games that went along with our lessons. Since it was such an unusually warm day for February, we also had the kids spend some time outside, getting some fresh air.

Our curriculum topic for the lock-in was the Exodus. I am notorious for writing more curriculum than we have time to get through, so we didn't do everything that I had planned, but we did read a lot of the Exodus story. We learned about the tetragrammaton, the holy name of God. We found a typo in some of our Bibles, that required me to shout at one point, "I'm getting my Hebrew Bible!"

We had a spirited theological debate about the plagues on the Egyptians. We learned about the wilderness wandering and whining of the newly freed Israelites, as they doubted God's guidance and providing care, and we played a blindfolded obstacle course game meant to simulate what it means to follow God when you really don't know and don't necessarily understand where you are going, where you're being led and why.

All of that made me think about the disciples, in today's gospel reading and before. It also made think, how many miracles, are many visions, are enough.

Because the Israelites, like the disciples, saw so many displays of God's power. Miracles performed by Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, plagues visited on the Egyptians as Moses spoke God's words to Pharaoh, "Let my people go," the pillar of fire and cloud, guiding them in the wilderness, the parting of the Red Sea and the routing and destruction of the Egyptian army, wouldn't you think that all of that would be enough to get the Israelites to trust God. But no, it wasn't, because on the other side of the sea, they cried out for water, for food, sure that Moses had led them into the wilderness to kill them, sure that it would have been better to live and die as slaves in Egypt rather than to wander in the wilderness, following a God they still did not seem to know or understand.

Today, in our gospel reading and in the festival for the day we follow Jesus and three of his disciples, Peter and James and John into their own wilderness, up a high mountain, for a private moment with Jesus. And I have to wonder if Jesus' disciples were tired, as they climbed that mountain. And I have to wonder if they might have questioned what they were doing, why they were there, what was going to happen next.

Sure, "Follow me" sounded very easy, very compelling when Jesus had first said it to them, and sure, they had seen some amazing things on their journey with Jesus, people healed, demons silenced, multitudes fed, but Jesus didn't always go about things the way that they thought that he should have. Sure, he healed people,

actually a lot of people, but he never healed everybody. He always kept moving, and there were always more sick people left behind. His way of doing things could have been seen as inefficient. And Jesus had also said some very challenging things on their journey with him.

One of those challenging things he said just six days before Peter and James and John followed Jesus up the mountain. He had talked about undergoing suffering. He had talked about rejection. He had talked about his own death and then about being raised from the dead, but who knew what that could mean. In fact, Peter had gotten into some trouble for challenging Jesus about his statements about his suffering and death. Jesus had spoken sternly to him, saying, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’

And then Jesus had taught them about what “Following him” would actually mean. He had talked about denying themselves and taking up crosses and losing their lives. This was not the kind of splashy healing and miracle working and teaching that they had come to expect from him. It was not the kind of talk that would bring crowds to him or increase his popularity or confirm him as the Messiah in his people’s eyes.

And what about us, who, have been called into the wilderness, like those ancient Israelites? What about us who have been called to leave behind the security and the certainties of empire? What about us, who, like Peter and James and John have been called to follow Jesus? Is following turning out the way we expected? Is God guiding us in the directions we were hoping for? Are we seeing the signs and wonders that we were anticipating?

Of course, that brings us back to my original question, how many miracles are enough? How many signs and wonders are enough? Because the Israelites saw the angel of death pass them over and they still doubted God’s providing care. And Peter and James and John had seen miracles upon miracles and yet, they still

wondered, questioned, doubted Jesus and what Jesus said his mission was. Surely, they must have thought, there is a different way, a better way.

And some of us, maybe many of us, have had those miracle moments in our lives. Those moments when we heard God speak. Those moments when we walked by sight and not by faith, those moments when we were fed with living bread and drank from living water; those moments when we didn't just believe, but knew. Perhaps not all of us have had those kinds of moments, but many of us have. And the question is, was it enough? Is it enough? Is it enough to sustain us in the wilderness? Is it enough to give us confidence in dry places? Is it enough to give us strength when we are tired; tired of the questions and the doubts and the work and the mysteries of loving and the challenges of following, when what we look back on seems so very simple, so very easy.

Today we find ourselves, with Peter and James and John on the mountaintop and what do we see? We see Jesus, transfigured, transformed before us, his clothes dazzling white, glowing with an inner light, joined by Elijah and Moses.

Are we terrified, like Peter and James and John? Are we tongue tied? Are we blustering? Are we thinking that we need to come up with a plan in response to this, some way of capturing this moment?

Because we don't. And Peter didn't. James didn't, John didn't. The point of this moment is not how we can control or capture it. The point of this moment is the blessing of getting to listen to the voice from heaven, speaking to us, confirming for us what we might already know. But then again, maybe we don't. Confirming for us, telling us, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

It's just a moment. What is left after all of this excitement, all of the beauty, all of the wide-eyed amazement of this moment is only Jesus. But Jesus is enough.

And we are called to listen to him. To listen to his teachings, to listen to his challenging words. And we are called to follow him back down the mountain.

I wonder if Peter and James and John were less tired when they went down the mountain than they were when they went up with Jesus. Less tired because of they had seen, because of what they had heard. Because they received on that mountain what they needed in order to be strengthened for the journey. Manna from heaven, not for their bodies, but for their spirits; living water that would sustain them.

And we have too. We have seen this vision. We have heard this voice. The promises are true. Jesus is the beloved son. And Jesus is with us in the wilderness. Thanks be to God. Amen.