

Calvary United Methodist Church
February 23, 2020

AMAZED
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Matthew 17:2-3

I invite the children to come forth for the children's message. A couple more want to come up. Thank you for coming up this morning. It's good to see you. A bit cold out there today.

I want to share a story today. It's call Transfiguration Sunday and it's a very special time in the year where some men that worked with Jesus took a walk with him. They took him for a hike and as they were there all of a sudden they saw something they had never seen before. You've probably had that experience at some time in your life where you have driven by something or seen something for many, many times and all of a sudden you saw something you never saw before. Well, in this story, James and Peter and John when with Jesus and I want you to hear it:

Six days later Jesus took Peter and his two brothers, James and John and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light.

Can you imagine that day? How many of you have noticed it is getting light earlier in the mornings? Have you noticed that? In just two weeks we change the clocks and that's a great time because then it will be light later in the evening as well. I remember when I was a little boy sometimes in the summer it was like you are trying to sleep and do your eyes ever do that squint thing because your blinds aren't pulled and the curtains aren't drawn and the sun comes in normally while you are sleeping because all through these next months the days will get longer and longer until mid-June. I think that's a good thing. Do you like that too? Most of you like that as well, right? It's nice to have those long summer days.

Well, I remember those days especially when I got to the age of working with my father. We would often most every day work before daylight and you would start to see the sun come up from the haze and it's like...this is a gift of a brand new day. And then sometimes years later I would walk in scouting or whatever the program and you are so cold in the morning...are you cold this morning? I was very cold when I went outside. I wasn't ready for that. And yet when the sunlight comes up if you have ever sat in the dark of a forest in the morning waiting to watch animals and as the sun comes up it's just like a big hug. When you are cold, does a hug help warm you? I hope so. Even when we are not feeling well sometimes when we are embraced by others we feel better and that sun is a part of the warming us up.

Now, they just sang a song if you heard the words, called Heavenly Sunlight and the one at the second service will be about a beam, Jesus wants me to be a sunbeam. Now, do you know what a sunbeam is? Let's take for instance there is a light right up here, you can see all these

lights. There is a beam of light that comes down and do any of you have blinds at your house instead of just curtains? If you look and the sun comes in there are little rays sometimes it just looks like lines of light that comes. That is sunbeams. Those sunbeams are what make us, at least for me and I suspect for a lot of you here, they make us feel good because it is a good thing to wake up in the morning and to have the gift of a new day.

What happened on this day when Jesus was with those friends, he took them for a hike and they saw not only Jesus, it was so bright they thought they saw also two very important people of history, Moses and Elijah. Now they had never met them, they had passed away a long time before, but they read about these powerful people of God who had done great things. And they were so amazed, they thought to themselves: How good is life? We are with our three greatest people ever.

Have you ever been in special places you didn't want to leave, like birthday parties or swimming or vacations or just with the family gathering it was so great you just didn't want it to end? Well, that was what Peter and James and John wanted. They thought: we could just stay here forever with Jesus and with Moses and Elijah. It's such a great thing. Even though they didn't know Moses and Elijah, they knew of them and so they said to Jesus: Why don't we just build a tent and stay here forever. Now do you really think it would be a good thing to stay in those happy places all the time? We really gotta leave it, don't we? As much as we don't want to leave maybe the beach or our camping or our family times and gatherings and the birthday parties. Sometimes we have to go back to regular life, right? We have to go to school and some people have to go to work.

And Jesus said: no, no, no, this isn't about just staying here because you can't keep a party all for yourself, you've got to share it. And there was a voice from heaven that was heard many times. It said: This is my son who I love. With him I am well pleased. It's like they heard God's voice telling them: Jesus is this one and I want you to listen to him. And that's what God says to us today: I want us to listen. I want us to listen.

And sometimes I have to confess I never heard God's voice saying: Hello, Jeff. I've never heard that, but I have heard God speaking to me. I hear it when I see someone in need. Have you ever seen someone and they fall down and you think I should help them? Or maybe they look hungry and you and your parents try to help feed someone and they are sick...there are so many times God speaks to us in our heart because we know the right thing to do.

And God is speaking all the time, but we have to take time to listen, right? God speaks every day. Sometimes you meet people along the path at school or at home and wherever you are, if you listen God will introduce you to people that can make a bit difference.

And so when I hear these words about a sunbeam, I think: Hmmm...I wonder if you and I can be a sunbeam? The next service the children are going to sing that song, Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam and they also are going to be Heavenly Light because light makes us feel bet-

ter, doesn't it? Most of the time, unless we are really tired and we want some darkness. But when we see the sunlight, we are empowered and when we feel light, like when we are at a birthday party and see all those candles and all those things.

So, we are to be light, we are to be shining bright inside and out. So there are days we don't always feel good, right? Do your parents ever say you are mopey today? Is that a word that anyone uses anymore? No one uses that word now. How about you are a little tired? Grumpy? Have you ever heard that word? Okay. So, God says in the middle of that, how can we try to be a light when we are grumpy? Because honestly we all have bad days, but the thing is to try to say: God, help me today to be sunny. Help me to be heavenly light, because the people around us need light. People around us don't need us to be grumpy. And if you are really in need a day, you are grumpy because you are sick or you are feeling down or you are tired, it's okay to tell other people: You know what? I need some light. Bring it on! You know, we need light too.

But God is calling us today that we might shine bright. So I pray, wherever you are and whatever you do, you'll think about those sunbeams coming into your room and how much power that gives you and think: How can you be bright? How can you be light? How can we be light to other people who are perhaps sad or down or grumpy and they just need God's hug. They need a big hug. And we are representing God just the way those men a long time ago did. He said: You can't just stay up here on this mountain in this good experience. You have to go back into the world and be a light.

Thank you for coming up today. There are some fruit snacks. And have a most blessed week.

Gospel Lesson:

The Gospel Lesson speaks to us this day about the Transfiguration Sunday. As we begin this season, Jesus is changing his pathway and it will be at the point at which he comes down from these mountains and he begins to tell everybody about his journey to the cross. He tells them about the cost of discipleship. It is a moving from following someone who you just thing is going to transform the world at little cost to you to finding someone that's asking you if you will follow and take up your cross.

(Matthew 17: 1-9)

Message:

Matthew 17:1-9

Wow! Can you imagine that journey? Up to the mountain, hearing the Word of God and having the Lord himself basically telling you: Don't worry. Everything will be fine. Do not be afraid. That's pretty amazing to me. I am amazed time and time again at what God does to get his Word to us that we might understand his love. His love, that wherever we go, God is trying to comfort us. In the midst of their fear, Jesus himself went from them and went

down to touch them and said: Please get up. Basically you are going to be okay, don't be afraid.

I have confessed before to you that growing up I was a scaredy cat. A lot of people made fun to me, you know. Some people still do. There are those things that we fear. As little children we fear darkness. We often fear the unknown, unknown situations, people we don't know, situations we have never been to, the new, change. Some people fear elevators and escalators and some people fear just a lot of things in life, water, height. I remember growing up and having fear about a lot of things. Some of the things really kept were things I enjoy. For instance, I love going to the mountains to a cabin with one of my family members, but to get to that beautiful cabin where it is peaceful, we had to go over a mountain that had sharp corners, dropping inclines and no guardrails. I would like slide to the other car if I could. You always want to be on that inside lane. And in the midst of all those things, I think about the trips of people making roads. Have you ever seen the road out of Pikes Peak? They actually raced that thing. I've gone up Pikes Peak three times. They don't race side by side, they time race. I think are these people crazy? But the thing I do know when I move away from my fear and my experiences and I finally get to where I want to be, I found a lot of mountaintop experiences. You get to the cabin and there is music and there are friends and there is family and there is food and there is fellowship and you don't want to leave, right?

We have so many fears in our lives and they hold us back. And God is saying all along: Don't worry. I go with you all the way. And when we allow ourselves to get up to those mountaintop experiences...now I've never been on a mountain like this, but I have been around Pennsylvania and we have some pretty fabulous overlooks in this state and when you get there, don't you want to say: Wow! I just don't want to leave here for a while.

And like those disciples, Jesus would say: It's fine to be up here, but you can't build a tent because life needs you. Your friends, your family, your coworkers, people that you haven't even prepared for need you because you are the beaming light, you are the Christ to them. You are carrying the message. You are equipped, you are empowered. God needs you and people need you. Yes, they need you at work, not just for physical work that you do at your job, they need you to be the light of Christ.

We often fear relationships, but I want to tell you, relationships can draw us close not to only wonderful folks, but sometimes it is a painful experience. The relationships draw us to Jesus Christ.

Every time we meet here we are reminded of relationships, what it can be like to be with Jesus Christ every day. In the midst of my fears when I travel or when I am home, and I often live with a lot more fear at home than I do when I travel: Lord, in the situation I am dealing with, in the situation I am living with right now with my family, with my children, with my parents, with life changes, with the economy, Lord, the changes in my own body, the changes that I face every day, will you come in and fill me? Will you give me a peace that whatever I

have to face in life or in death, that I don't have fear. And Jesus says: I'm right there with you. I am right there with you in all of these changes. I will be the one, and when you get there, it's like saying: It's almost heaven. It is.

For year, I witnessed a lot of death in this job and been with those who had illnesses and sudden losses and I have had to deal with a lot of death in my own life. In the midst of that at some point you have to look and say: Am I okay in life and in death? And I've come to peace that death is a lot less frightening to me sometimes than living. Where do we find the peace knowing that we are okay in life and death? That we are okay, not only on the top of the mountains, but in the valleys.

We sang a song here two or three times last fall when we had our guitar gatherings about God on the mountain: God on the mountain is still God in the valley. Folks, these men, Peter and James and John, went up to the mountain and they loved it so much they didn't want to come down to the valley because they knew what the valley is like. You know what it's like every day when you go to work and there is someone there that makes it difficult or some situation that makes it difficult or some boss that makes it difficult. You know what it is like when you are not getting along with family members or friends or neighbors. The valley seems so hard. And God, through Jesus was speaking to those disciples who were with him and saying: It's not right that we stay here in peace all the time. The peace you feel today, you can take it with you in the valley because we need to learn to live in a worshipful body. I try to do that and I suspect you do too. When you wake in the morning and say: Lord, I am yours today. I am totally yours. I am an instrument of your peace. Please fill me, give me your peace, because, Lord, I don't have it at times because I kind of want to get nervous and worried and upset and live in fear. And Jesus said: Jeff, let's clean that out of there. Whatever you do today, know that I am with you. I am the same Lord and Master that told Peter and James and John to please get up, don't be afraid. Everything will be fine. I am going to be with you.

I've never tried one of these things. Our church camps do them now. Have any of you ever done an escape room? Regis? Okay. It's a newer thing, I guess the young people do. I've never tried it. They have these rooms where people play for birthdays, anniversaries and parties. You go and there are all kinds of clues of how you can get out of this room. I think there are a lot of us who are somehow trying to escape all the problems that we have without confronting them and without having Jesus. I know this: when I am overwhelmed, when I am living in fear and I am living in worry, my best escape is a final solution. It is Jesus Christ, please Lord and Master, rule my life. Lead me in where I am to go, because I can't get out of there. I can't do it on my own.

We needed to do glasses like those disciples needed that day. They needed to be able to see that they couldn't just stand on top, that they had to take the Lord, the Master, they had to take God himself with them that whatever they faced they could face it and be bold and be strong and overcome and know that they could be okay.

The song that I shared continues: For the God on the mountain is still God in the valley. When things go wrong, say it: He'll make them right. He'll make them right.

I don't always understand how it happens, but at the end of the day, it's okay. Even in our losses, as painful as they can be; even in our disappointments as hurtful as they can be, God says: I will make them right. You just hold on.

Jesus time and time again was talking to the disciples to remind them that they would never be left alone: I will never leave or forsake you. One of the things they learned when he left that day and he came down the mountain was this: He changed their expectations. It's one thing to want a Lord and a Master, it's something else to want someone who wants you to follow in their footsteps. He had expectations, expectations that those who claim him as their Savior would be life giving people to other people.

Those who coach anybody in any sport, in any part of academia, any part of dance or any other kind of arts, they never say: Well, try your best, right? If your expectations are down here, you are not going to go far. The expectations of every coach in every area of life is: I don't want just your best. I want your all. I want everything you have. And that is God to us saying: I want it all. Take up your cross and follow me. What does it take? How much does it cost? Jesus says this: I want all or nothing. You are either on board, you are either one of my disciples, you are either trusting me to be your all in all or you can have nothing. The disciples that day, they wanted to just, it's easy to want to good. But he said: No, no, no, no, you've got to go back down into that valley. You've got to understand where you are going. How could they face it? What was their past?

The past was Moses and Elijah. They knew the stories from the Old Testament of these powerful prophets and leaders. And they knew the present and they knew what the future was going to be because they had already heard the story of Jesus saying that he would lay down his life and you and I as disciples of Christ know the rest of that story, that we too can come to this man Jesus. We can look unto him and we can get charged up and we can get to the top of the mountain and we can know what it is like so we are equipped to go into the world.

Our faith does no good if it stays in this place. We are living in a broken world. People everywhere around us are looking for hope. Prophet Isaiah says this: Many people will come and say come, let's go to the mountain of the Lord or the Temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways so that we may...what may we do? Walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. If we want lasting communion from God, we've got to maintain every day.

I've been so blessed in life to be a part of a fellowship like Calvary and the other church I've served and family gatherings with brothers and sisters of faith and a variety of ages, a variety

of cultures. There is no place that I would rather be on all the earth than in a communion of saints like you. Is there anything better that we can support and encourage and build up one another? Because when we do this we prepare one another. We prepare by coming here to go into the world and to be filled with the Holy Spirit and that Spirit says: I will send you, I will equip you, I will give you everything you need to go forth that you might have that power, that you might be a sunbeam.

When I talk about the children having a sunbeam and feeling like a warm hug, I mean that. There are days when you are so cold that when the sun comes in your shivers disappear and it feels like someone is embracing you. I have been alone an awful lot in my life and I want to tell you when you know people are praying for you and you know that God is with you, that you know that no matter where you are or what you will do, you are not really alone, that's a blessing. You being a sunbeam is this: someone taking that beam into your fellowship.

People around us are so imprisoned in fears, and I'm not talking about necessarily behind bars and many are there as well, but you alone are the beam, you are the light switch that can turn on to someone to say: Whoa! I would like to invite you to a fellowship, wherever you want to go, doesn't have to be Calvary, to meet Jesus Christ. I'd like you to meet the Savior who will be with you when you are lost. I'd like you to meet the Savior who transformed that broken relationship or if nothing else get you out of a broken relationship that is abusive or painful and is crushing your life. I will be the switch that turns you on to find that you who think you are a nobody is somebody great because God has empowered you to do great things. You and you alone, hear that, you and you alone are the light to touch somebody that nobody else will touch, if you allow that light of Jesus Christ to live through you.

The cross after the grave was known as the symbol of our forgiveness and our salvation and that cross is now the symbol of new life to all who come there. The people around us and perhaps even in our own days we needed to be reminded that that cross is a place for redemption. There are a lot of people who feel that there is no one who cares at all about them and God says to us: We are those who tell them they are loved. They are redeemed. They have been locked with Christ. They have been given the salvation and new life and I pray that you will understand that power that Peter and James and John got that day, that you will receive that power as your own and that you will take that to somebody who needs you to share Christ with them.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, thank you for trusting us. We are truly amazed for sometimes we think of ourselves as insignificant but, Lord, you tell us that is not so. We are children of the Mighty King, we are heirs of your kingdom and we have a message of salvation to share with everyone. Empower us to go forth, Lord, this day and every day to be a beam of light, of hope, of peace, of salvation for others. In Jesus' Holy name. Amen.