

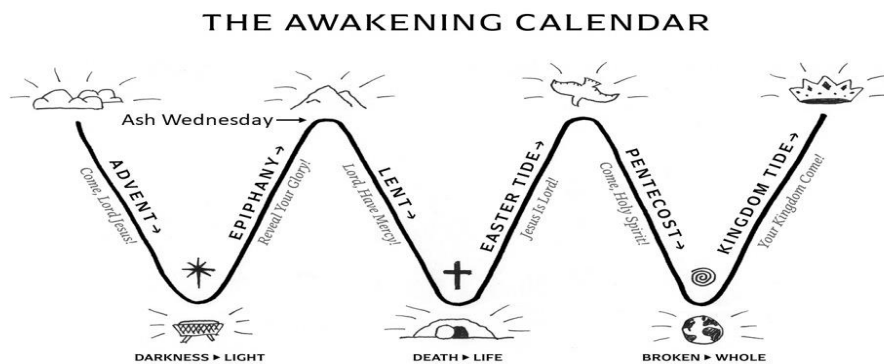
Sermon – February 27, 2022
“This is my Son, my Chosen: listen to him!”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: Luke 9:28-43a

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

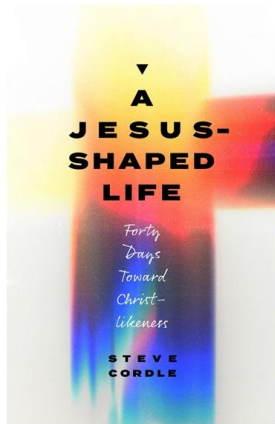
Good morning! Before we look at this morning’s text, I would like to lead us into a time of celebration. This past Wednesday at Good News Club, three children accepted Jesus as their Savior. The angels in heaven are giving praise to God for those lives that once were lost but are now saved. Can we do the same here this morning? Give God some glory this morning for the gift he has given to His new children through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are now sons and daughters of the King, princesses and princes in the kingdom of God. I also ask us to keep these new believers and their families in prayer, asking Jesus to lead them to a local body of Christ, a church, who will love and nurture them, discipling them into a life with Jesus Christ.

Let me put up a graphic this morning to remind us of where we are on the Christian calendar. We are leaving the season of Epiphany behind and moving through another major



inflection point on our timeline. As Jesus comes down from the mountain of transfiguration and heads towards another mountain, the mountain of crucifixion, we also this week on Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, move into the season of Lent, a season of reflection, repentance, and seeking

God. There are some devotional materials available that we may find helpful for our Lenten journey. We are asking for a donation for the books, but don't let that stop you from taking one. There is also a free resource available to guide us into new habits during Lent, new spiritual disciplines. This resource will be focused on the discipline of daily examen, a practice that is meant to help us grow into thankfulness for what Christ has given to us.



Let's move to today's text. Let me begin by providing some background and context. Prior to this climb up the mountain with Jesus, Peter has made a declaration of who Jesus is, the Messiah of God. Jesus has also clearly told his disciples, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Now, eight days later, Jesus has invited Peter, John, and James to go with him up a mountain to pray. Luke does not tell us the time of day this occurs, but from the disciples' sleepiness and Jesus' habit of praying at night, I assume this event occurs at night.

The disciples are weighed down with sleep as Jesus prays. First, don't miss that Jesus is praying. Also, don't miss that Jesus is praying on a mountain, a location that brings the expectation of an encounter with God, and Jesus has companions present. Having companions with him will be duplicated in the Garden of Gethsemane on another mountain in the future.

Notice the large number of verbs found here related to seeing. Luke speaks to the appearance of Jesus' face and the dazzling white clothes. The Greek word translated here as dazzling is a word used in Greek to describe a lightning flash. I don't think dazzling or shiny are adequate translations. This is a brightness like that of a lightning flash, blinding, filling our eyes, flooding out all other images from our sight. The disciples also see two men with Jesus, Moses and Elijah, who are also in some form of glory or essence of who they now are. Luke tells us that because the disciples did not fall asleep, or as they wake up from sleep, they see Jesus' glory and

they also see Jesus' essence. I can't imagine what this scene looked like to a disciple present on the mountain, nor what it did to their thoughts about Jesus and who he is. Luke tells us they saw Jesus' glory and the two men who were with Jesus, who were just leaving, were also in glory. A bewildered Peter takes the moment when these two men are leaving to speak. Peter asks Jesus if they should build three booths, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Peter wants this moment on the mountain to be extended, to extend their time with these men and Jesus. Peter also demonstrates that he does not yet understand who Jesus is, as he proposes to make Jesus equal to these great prophets whom God has worked through in history. Peter seeks to interrupt the leaving of Moses and Elijah so that they might linger longer with Jesus and in the sight of the disciples. I don't think we can find fault with Peter's response. He may be overwhelmed by what he is witnessing. I am certain I would be.

We should not miss the connections that Luke is making for us between the Exodus of Israel from their long, cruel bondage in Egypt and this moment on the mountain. Moses' presence on this mountain points us to past times on Mount Sinai when Moses was in God's presence in the cloud on that mountain. The mention by Peter of the tabernacles connects us with the tabernacle built in the wilderness for God's presence. Another connection to the Exodus story includes the companions going up the mountain with Jesus, connecting this moment to the time when the elders went with Moses up on Mount Sinai to meet with God. The setting of this moment on a mountain connects with the time in the wilderness when God spoke to Israel and gave the law. The cloud that will arrive shortly connects to the cloud that covered the mountain in the wilderness. The fear that the disciples experience here on this mountain connects to the fear of the people when they heard God speak to them from the cloud and they begged Moses not to have them hear any more of God's words. The words God will speak from the cloud here connect to Deuteronomy 18:15, where we are told to heed a prophet like Moses whom God will raise up. And finally, the discussion between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus about his coming "exodus" or departure, connects this moment to the Exodus from Egypt. There is clearly a connection here to freedom from bondage that Luke wants his readers to discover.

We should ask ourselves, why does Jesus have Peter, John and James with him on the mountain? Why are they present to see his glory? The best answer I have found for that question is that Jesus is giving a fuller revelation of who he is to these witnesses. Jesus will no longer be just a teacher for them; he will be something more. Jesus will no longer be a warring messiah to

free them from Rome, Jesus is revealed as more than what they have thought, and the extent of that “more” will become clearer to them as they walk with Jesus to Jerusalem and experience the cross, the empty tomb, and a resurrected Jesus.

Moses and Elijah are present with Jesus, and while they may represent the Law and prophets of the Old Testament, their presence reveals more. That they appear in glory shows they are with Jesus in glory. They also represent the book ends of the prophets of the Old Testament. Their presence on the mountain helps us understand that God did not complete His work with these two prophets, but that God sent Jesus to complete the work of salvation, of freedom from bondage to sin and death. Jesus has a role, the key role, in bringing God’s plans to completion. Moses and Elijah point to God’s purpose to bring liberation from bondage, bondage to something more than slavery in Egypt. Jesus’ presence and transfiguration reveal him as the one through whom we interrupt the words of the prophets. We need Jesus in order to understand what God is accomplishing. We need Jesus in order to understand the love God has for all of God’s people. Jesus is all we need.

Before the words of Peter’s request have been addressed, a cloud appears and overshadows those on the mountain top and those present enter the cloud. This is not a thundercloud that has descended on the mountain top. This cloud is the presence of God, the shekinah glory of God. We see this as the disciples enter the cloud and they are filled with fear. The verbs on the mountain change from seeing to hearing, and God speaks, telling the disciples who Jesus is. God tells them that Jesus is God’s son. God identifies Jesus as unique in relationship with God. This makes Jesus the chosen one of God, the one who is to complete God’s mission to liberate the people of God. Like Moses, Jesus is called to a prophetic role to reveal God’s way and bring forth the people of God into the kingdom of God. Jesus, like Moses, will be a deliverer of God’s people, bringing them out of bondage to sin and death into a new existence. This is not a move from the wilderness to the promised land of Canaan. This is the freedom from slavery to sin and death and the entry into the vision of God: God present with God’s people, no more pain, no more death, and God wiping away our tears. This is not entry into a land flowing with milk and honey, but a place where God dwells with God’s people.

In the midst of the cloud, the disciples hear God speak. This is the second time that God has spoken in Luke’s Gospel. The first was to Jesus at his baptism. This time, God speaks to the disciples and tells them to “Listen to Jesus.” It is through Jesus that the Law and the prophets

will be interpreted. When the cloud leaves, only Jesus remains. Moses and Elijah are no longer needed. It is Jesus who will bring God's mission to completion. It is Jesus who will provide the needed interpretation of God's Law and prophetic voices sent over the ages to Israel. God tells the disciples to listen to Jesus. It is through Jesus' words and actions that they, that we, will finally understand God's plan. Listening to Jesus becomes the responsibility of Jesus' disciples. Here on the mountain those disciples are Peter, John, and James. Today it is the responsibility of the gathered body of Christ to listen to Jesus, to study Jesus' words, and to dwell in those words and let those words dwell in and transform us into the image of Jesus. After God speaks, the cloud lifts and there is only Jesus with the three disciples on the mountain. These three disciples do not speak about this time on the mountain with Jesus until they have walked with Jesus through the events yet to come in Jerusalem. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, they can understand and share what they have experienced on the mountain.

Notice that when Jesus comes down the mountain, he encounters a crowd. Jesus and these three disciples have gone from a mountain top experience, from a meeting with God, to a crowd waiting in bondage at the bottom of the mountain. From that crowd, a dad shouts out and begs Jesus to heal his only son, complaining that Jesus' disciples have not been able to help. Jesus' response here seems out of character for the mild and kind image of Jesus we often hold of him. He tells this dad, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" Jesus comes down from a time with his Father, from a time when his glory has shone forth and from a time when he has talked with Moses and Elijah about his departure, to encounter a generation that does not know who Jesus is and yet seeks his teaching and help as if that is all that Jesus has for them. Jesus is looking forward to another mountain where he will free this generation and all generations from their bondage, yet they do not know him. Jesus tells the dad to bring his son to him and as he does, the bondage of the age becomes known in the child's situation. Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit, heals the child, and gives him back to his dad. Jesus sets the captives free from bondage, both for an individual child, an only son, and soon for all of the captives who are separated from God by their sin. Jesus' healing of the child and liberation of him from cruel slavery points to another coming mountain, where Jesus will suffer and die to liberate us from our sin.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before the start of Lent. We have been on the mountain with Jesus and have encountered his glory. We have heard God tell Jesus' disciples

to “Listen to Jesus.” Our response to these words defines the season of Lent, if not a Christian life. Lent is a time for us to listen to Jesus, to be like Mary and sit at our Lord’s feet and just listen to him. Lent is a time for us to set aside that which calls to us and the busyness we fill our lives with and to instead repent of our distractions, recognize our bondage, and to listen to Jesus. We are to believe in Jesus and obey the voice of God. We are to seek ways to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to him, not just on Sunday morning, but always, continuously, seeking to let Jesus displace that which distracts us from God and fill us with that which draws us into God’s presence.

How do we sit at Jesus’ feet? First, we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept him as our Savior. Next, we obey his commands and love one another. As we love each other, as we seek each day to provoke each other to love, as long as it is today, we are to be those who are abiding in Jesus and growing into his image. As we grow in love and our love of others spills over out of the door of the church, out of our homes, out of our lives, and others encounter this love of Jesus, they are drawn into this extravagant love. As we grow in Jesus’ love, we become those whom Jesus works through to liberate others. Let me encourage us to use the season of Lent to seek to sit at Jesus’ feet and to listen to him. Use the means of grace—fasting, prayer, reading the scriptures, listening to a sermon or sermons, Communion—develop new habits or spiritual disciplines, and above all love one another.

When the disciples go up the mountain with Jesus, they are weighed down with sleep. We also as Jesus’ disciples are weighed down with the cares of the world and are asleep to Jesus’ voice. Like Peter, John, and James, we are to wake up, O sleeper, and when we wake up, the glory of Jesus will shine on us! So, come and sit down at Jesus’ feet, focus on him, and listen to him, letting all other cares fade away and keeping the one thing, the love of Christ, in our hearts.

Pray with me: Come, Holy Spirit, come and guide us during the season of Lent and at all times to be those who are seeking to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to him. Help us to learn to choose the best part. Open our ears, Jesus, to hear your words and transform us into your image. Lord, we ask that you would show us what we need to release so that we might be filled with your words and be those who listen to you and love others as you love us. Awaken us, Lord Jesus, and shine your essence into our hearts. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.