

March 1, 2025
Luke 9:28-45
Rev. Kelley Becker

Prelude-Ben

Welcome-Kelley

Good morning! I am Rev. Kelley Becker, and I am happy to welcome you this morning to Disciples Christian Church. This is the last Sunday before we begin the liturgical season of Lent, which is a season of self-reflection and an opportunity for us to consider whether our lives reflect what we believe about God and other human beings, and it is a season to turn from what keeps us from becoming who we were created to be and to turn toward what brings us closer to that person. I look forward to our Lenten journey together. Today we are continuing the sermon series on the Gospel of Luke, in which we are learning how the author and the original audience of this gospel understood Jesus and the stories that were being told about him. Today's text is from chapter 9 and it encourages us to use our imaginations as the author of Luke pulls out all the special effects to tell this story.

Call to Worship and Invocation-Kelley

From seashore to mountain top,
from lonely place to hillside,
from touching lepers to catching fish,
From baptism's water to calling disciples,
from synagogue exorcism to transfiguration,
we have been shown what the kin-dom of God is like.

The revealing,
the making known,
the unfolding,
the manifesting,
the unveiling,
the unmasking,
of Jesus and his ways. We come to be surprised, enlightened, and loved.
Will you pray with me?
Holy One,
Behind all things
behind even the grayest of days,
there are glimpses of light
a light that welcomes
a more profound way of seeing things
that transfigures the world
that casts a spell of hope
that sees beyond the here and now

It is that hope dwelling here now.
Show us the light of your love this morning. Amen.

Bringing in the Light and the Communion Elements

Each time we worship together, we experience again that the gift of community is life-changing and life-saving. We light candles in our worship space to remind us that the light of Love is everywhere and in everyone and that Love is always more powerful than fear. We bring bread and juice to the table as a reminder of our dependence on the earth, each other, and our Creator.

Let us bring in the Light and the communion elements as we sing.
(light candle, bring in elements)

****While the elements and light are brought in, sing:
Song:#64 We Sing Your Mighty Powers, O God**

Community Joys and Concerns-Kelley

We have come to a time of community prayer. If you are worshipping remotely, I invite you to share your prayer requests in the comments of this broadcast or direct message us.

Prayer Requests:

Crawford family

Keffer family

Charlotte

Sheena

Immigrants

Government employees

Ukraine

I know you have prayers on your heart this morning. I invite you to come forward and light a candle for someone for whom you are praying.

Song: #295 CH In This Very Room

lyric change: last line"...for Spirit, God's Spirit, is in this very room."

Pastoral Prayer-Kelley

based on a prayer posted on revgalblogpals.org

Holy One,

Some of us feel like we have climbed just a part of the mountain,
and there is so much more of a climb left to even
dream that we might be dazzled by what is Divine.

Our loads are heavy,
with worry, with regret,
with fatigue, with illness,

with despair for all in the world
that is hurting, in danger, oppressed, and more.

We trudge ahead, following you,
stumbling, hoping, praying...
breathing hard, hearts pounding,
and trying to quiet our Sunday scares.

Walk with us
to the top of that mountain,
where we might be dazzled by your Light,
lifted by what is Sacred,
filled by the sheer delight
of what is spiritual and grounded and real.

We pray this,
for ourselves, for one another,
and for the world.
Hear us now as we pray together...
Holy One, who art in heaven...

Offering

This week, your generosity allowed me to officiate at Rob Crawford's mom's funeral. Before the service, the family talked to me about her generosity and about the ways they felt loved and valued because of it. Your gifts enable us to show our neighbors they are loved and valued. Thank you.

If you have already given online or have given your time this week, please put an offering card in the plate as it is passed. The deacons will now collect the offering.

Song: #249 CH Spirit

Offering Prayer

Holy One,
Use our generosity to show our neighbors who you are and who we are.
Amen.

Now, I invite the children to come forward as we sing.

As children come forward:

Song: Namaste

Children's Moment-Anna

Sermon-Kelley

***Title Slide**

Seven years ago, this congregation officially became an Open & Affirming congregation, which means that we are committed to fully welcoming all people in the Queer Community into the life of the church. The term Open & Affirming is tied specifically to welcoming our LGBTQIA+ neighbors, but declaring ourselves Open & Affirming has encouraged us to talk and think about the importance of welcoming everyone who seeks to love and be loved. We believe there isn't anybody who doesn't need community and a sense of belonging; everyone has something to teach us about the character of the Divine. The more we welcome, the more we see and know of God.

***Theophany**

Today's text is what's known as a theophany. A theophany is "a moment in which the Holy shows up visibly or manifests in a tangible way." Since I was busy thinking about moments like that in my own life this week, I invited the folks at Pub Theology to share moments when they had experienced God showing up in an especially meaningful or tangible way. It was fun to talk about those moments and to share what about them was special.

As part of that conversation, I shared the story of how we became Open & Affirming. After the Elders engaged in a process of discernment, the congregation was invited into the process. There were opportunities to ask questions, learn, and reflect on what kind of church we wanted to be. At some point, we decided that rather than voting, each church member would put their name on a paper dove and hang it in the Fellowship Hall when they were comfortable with DCC becoming Open & Affirming.

***Kelley preaching**

The first chance members had to do that was on a Sunday morning worship. That week, I preached about the importance of everyone having a place at the table. Following that sermon and communion, as we sang the closing song, charter members of the church, Blaine and JoAn Fraser, stood up, walked across the sanctuary, and were the first to sign their names to doves. That moment felt very much like a theophany to me. God showed up in such a real way.

***Doves**

Others followed the Frasers and those paper doves became symbols of the Sacred. That day DCC, which has always been a church that values hospitality, very publicly declared, "This is who we are." Similarly, today's story, and the theophany it presents, makes it very clear who the author of Luke believed Jesus was.

This is Luke 9:28-36.

28...Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking about

his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but as they awoke they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah," not realizing what he was saying. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

***Different version of title slide**

This story or a story like this appears in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, in addition to the one here in Luke. Like last week's story, there are differences between them and, again, like last week, Luke's story is a bit of an outlier. It is generally titled, "The Transfiguration" or "Jesus is Transfigured." I like the way this story was titled in the First Nations translation of the New Testament, "The Mountain Where He Shined." And in a commentary I read this week, the story was titled "Discerning the Way Forward." The way the story is told in Luke and its placement in the gospel encourages Luke's audience to focus on the experience Jesus had on the mountain, while Matthew and Mark's versions zoom in on what the disciples experienced, which to be fair, was really cool. This morning, we will do a little of both.

In Luke, the transfiguration is preceded by several stories in which Jesus' identity is questioned. You may recall that two weeks ago we read the story of John the Baptist's question about who Jesus was, and last week we read about Simon the Pharisee's assessment of Jesus' identity. After those stories, right before today's text, there is an exchange between Jesus and his disciples. He asked the disciples who the crowds were saying he was. They answered that some were saying John the Baptist, others Elijah. And then Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" And Peter, bless him, has the right answer for a change, "The Messiah of God," he said. Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone and said, "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." 23 Then he said to them all, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

All of this to say, Jesus' identity was an important point the author wanted to make. Following all this talk about who Jesus was comes the mountaintop experience, Matthew and Mark don't say why Jesus went up the mountain, but Luke tells us that he went up there to pray. And that is when the cool stuff started happening. Now whether you believe this was a miracle that actually happened or whether, like me, you think it is something else, we cannot and should not just gloss over the symbolism and special effects.

First, there is a reason mountaintop experiences are generally considered positive and important. The ancients believed that when a person was on a mountain, they were closer to God, and we know that when people come close to God, big things happen. So naturally, atop the mountain, the disciples fell asleep. The First Nations version of this story goes so far as to say they were “deep asleep.” While Jesus prayed, the appearance of his face changed; his face and his clothes were glowing. The disciples opened their eyes not only to glowing Jesus but to Moses and Elijah as well. We don’t know how the disciples were supposed to know it was Moses and Elijah and it doesn’t really matter. What matters is the symbolism.

***Moses**

There is a connection between this story and Moses’ story. In Exodus, after Moses had his mountaintop encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, in which he was given the tablets with the Ten Commandments, the author wrote that his face was radiant; he too was glowing. Because of this, in Luke’s story, Moses represents the Torah. Which means Elijah represents the prophetic tradition in the Hebrew Bible. Elijah had a cool God moment as well, in 2 Kings “a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated Elijah and his apprentice Elisha, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.”

In a detail unique to the Gospel of Luke, not only does Jesus talk to the heavenly messengers, but the author tells us what they were talking about. Their conversation fills us in on what was revealed to Jesus in prayer. In the *Wisdom Commentary for Luke 1-9*, scholars Barbara Reid and Shelly Matthews write, “They speak about his ‘departure’ that he is about to accomplish in Jerusalem. The [Greek word used for] departure has a double meaning: departure from among the living and [it refers to] the [story of Israelites] exodus from Egypt. [In prayer] Jesus discerns that he is to go to Jerusalem and be put to death there, but his death won’t be the end of his mission. Rather, it will accomplish a new ‘exodus’ for his people, a liberating movement that will be continued by his disciples.”¹ Here we see again, the author’s focus on Jesus’ identity. For Luke, the moment on the mountaintop is the pivotal moment in the narrative, for after that experience, in just a few verses Jesus will, “set his face to go to Jerusalem,” and he knew what to expect when he got there. Reading this story in the First Nations version this week reminded me that Jerusalem means “the village or city of peace.” Not only is the name ironic for Jesus’ day, but for today too. There is no peace for the Israelis in Jerusalem or for the Palestinians in Gaza.

Though the story is predominantly about Jesus for Luke, we can’t just leave the disciples hanging. Their experience matters too. Also, I think we can relate to the disciples in this story a little easier than to the glowing Jesus. Peter, fresh from his correct answer to the question, “Who do you say I am,” blurts out the following, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

¹ Reid, Barbara and Shelly Matthews, *Wisdom Commentary: Luke 1-9*, (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 2021), 288.

God bless him. He was overwhelmed. Who wouldn't be? The text tells us that, in typical Peter fashion, he didn't know what he was saying. One of the many reasons I love Peter. And before anyone even has time to roll their eyes at him, the Holy appears as a cloud.

In a blog post, author and theologian Diana Butler Bass wrote about this story, saying, "This episode sounds like thousands of stories from native religions or a transcript of a contemporary psychedelic therapy session. This gospel passage relates a mystical experience that was shared by Jesus and his closest followers. It includes all the requisite elements of such — prayer, the mountain, "dazzling" light, altered reality, **hearing [emphasis mine]** sacred voices...

And clouds. The transcendent zenith of the passage isn't the appearance of Moses and Elijah — the prophets are the prelude to the real point of the story.

The climax [of the story] is in the clouds:

***Scripture**

'While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'

They were terrified as they entered the cloud."² The author doesn't describe the cloud.

***Airplane and storm clouds**

Not all clouds are scary. The big puffy white ones that look like teddy bears and marshmallows aren't scary. Storm clouds, though, especially here in Oklahoma, can be quite intimidating. And have you ever been on an airplane when it has flown through a storm cloud? It's both cool and terrifying.

And so is finding God in a cloud. For the disciples, this story wasn't about clarifying the days to come or even Jesus' glowing face. This story was about finding God, not in a temple and not when everything is going well and all is right with the world, but amid even the parts of life that are unexpected and scary. And based on what we know of Jesus and the disciples' journey ahead, recognizing God is the scary and messy will serve them well.

Every time I read this story, I can't help myself, I wish God would show up as tangibly as God showed up for the disciples that day. Someone at Pub Theology shared that he has a friend who regularly hears the voice of God. Sometimes I want that. And sometimes I don't. And to be clear, who could know if I would even listen?

I do believe that the Holy shows up for all of us in ways that perhaps only we can understand. This text seems to be telling us the way to understand is not in glowing faces, lightening bolts, and other special effects, it is through listening. Later in her blog post, Butler Bass continues, "...the Voice speaks in the midst of tumult. And its

² <https://progressivechristianity.org/resource/sunday-musings-with-diana-butler-bass-the-feast-of-the-transfiguration/>, accessed 2/28/25.

directive is odd — not “come and see,” a phrase often repeated in the gospels, but is instead, ‘listen.’ ...this is a mystical experience, of the sensory perception of hearing...the best mystical experiences speak to living with faith in the world. Everyone comes off the mountain, carrying only the memory of what was learned.”³

The world right now feels especially turbulent, doesn't it? I texted a friend on Friday and asked her if she was in her office. Her response was, “Yes, is everything okay?” I replied, “Yes, I just need to use your printer.” But I thought, “Of course not. Nothing feels okay. Everything is not fine. The world is scary as hell.” And also, the fact that she felt the need to ask and not just say, “Yes, I'm in my office,” says everything we need to know. This story tells us that right here in the middle of “scary as hell,” is sacredness.

We probably spend too much time hoping for a miracle, wishing God would show up like we expect God to show up. Sitting around hoping for miracles or for things to just work themselves out isn't going to change anything. Not that I don't believe in miracles...I do. I just believe that God equips us to work them....together. There is a little comfort in not having to worry alone, but the real comfort is in doing something together, in creating belonging and safety, in doing justice, and showing compassion for our neighbors, even though we are scared as hell right now.

This week, our elder chair, Kris Zorn, prayed at the end of a meeting and she asked God to help us hear and to help us listen. That was a great prayer. I haven't stopped thinking about that prayer.

***Quote**

Psychologist Carl Rogers said, “We think we listen, but rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening of this special kind is one of the most potent forces for change that I know.” Our United Church of Christ siblings tell us that “God is still speaking.” If that is true and I think it is, we must listen.” Let us not fixate on the special effects and shiny objects. We cannot allow our fear of the future to keep us from working for the future we want, and that we believe God wants. God is right here, amid the turmoil and everything we fear. Listen. It isn't Jesus that needs to be transformed. It is us...all of us. Jesus fulfilled his mission, now it's our turn. Amen.

Song: #658 CH Restless Weaver (vs. 1,4)

Communion-Kelley

Communion Music: Open Table (music and lyrics emailed)

Building the Community-Kelley

Fat Tuesday-5:30 pm, Cooper and Mill

³ <https://progressivechristianity.org/resource/sunday-musings-with-diana-butler-bass-the-feast-of-the-transfiguration/>, accessed 2/28/25.

Sign up for bread...Ash Wed. Soup Supper-5:45 pm, Worship at 6:30 pm
Ashes to Go-12:15-1:15 pm
Common Ground, starting next Wed. at 6:30 pm
Donna Keffer's mom's celebration of life: Sat. 3/8, 11 am

Song: #431 CH Go, My Children, with My Blessing

One verse: Go, my children, with my blessing, closer to me;
Grow in love and love by serving, joyful and free.
Here my Spirit's power filled you, here my tender comfort stilled you;
Go my children, with my blessing, joyful and free.

Benediction-Kelley

Postlude-Ben