

Transfiguration and Transition

St. Ben's 8.6

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing
to you, Holy One.

This is one of those Sundays where you have a sermon written ahead of time, and then Saturday happens, and you realize you have to throw out the whole thing and just start over.

When I was in Seminary, we had barely started our work together when COVID shut everything down. We had built a strong community, and the family-like community we had built was torn apart as we were scattered back in multiple directions when the campus switched to remote learning. The handful of us that were left on campus were isolated as we learned about what it meant to create family units and pods and live in a community with people, we had just met a few months ago. We were trying to deal with grief and loss, and navigating so much transition in a very short amount of time. During that time, many of us went through the loss of close family members whose funerals we couldn't attend due to travel restrictions. Unable to hug each other for comfort, the isolation was even more pronounced. The benefits of living in a community and being there for each other had to shift and looked more like weekly Zoom calls and daily text check-ins. We shared

evening compline over multiple time zones to stay connected. Just like we had done in person before we were scattered. We would connect over homework and try to remember what brought us to seminary in the first place.

We tried to focus on our collective mission when the isolation would get overwhelming. I remember going for walks on the empty campus when the fog was in. It hung on the campus, in the trees, and you could barely see the buildings in front of you. It was my favorite time to wander campus because you could feel the air, and it reminded me of our Gospel text for today.

I always felt so close to the Holy in those moments. I feel the same when the Marine Layer rolls into Los Osos. That being in the fog always felt so mysterious and like a Holy space to me, even when I wasn't on a mountain.

I think there was just something about the darkness but also how bright it was in the fog. I couldn't see anything, but I also didn't need to. I could just be there talking to God. How magical a space. Even though I was alone, I could feel connected to the Holy there and be reminded of the community I did have surrounding me. It felt like a literal cloud of witnesses in some ways.

This week we celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration. For those of you keeping track, yes, we also talk about the transfiguration during Holy week, yet here we are talking about it again because it is also a day

set aside every year on August 6 to allow us once again to remember, discuss and celebrate the transfiguration of Jesus.

The Gospel appointed for this feast day is Luke. The main difference in this text is that it begins with prayer. They went up the mountain to pray. And it was while Jesus was praying that he was transfigured.

This is unique to Luke's Gospel and makes sense as Luke often calls us to prayer and discernment through his accounting of the Gospel text. One of the reasons to share the transfiguration twice a year is to be able to focus on two different components of the narrative. During Holy Week, the focus is often Christological or who Christ is, the revelation of Christ as divine, and how that manifests in the transfiguration narrative and what that can mean for us as disciples of Jesus.

Yet, this time around, while those components are absolutely present, as we hear God's voice from the cloud say, "This is my son, my Chosen; listen to him!" the focus for us at this time is more about how that speaks to us as the body of Christ or in a missional way.

Last week Berkeley gave a wonderful sermon about relationships and his experience of St. Benedict's, its ministries, and the amazing work of its people.

As those who are called, as our Gospel says, to "listen to him" as a community, we are called to pause and consider what this might point us to in this time of transition. The events of the mountaintop were

very clear. They provided everything the disciples would have needed to identify Jesus as the Son of God, yet they didn't share what they saw with anyone. They still seemed a little confused about what was really going on. Peter wasn't even sure if they should stay. Yet as observers of this text, this passage helps us to understand the full nature of Christ as divine, even if the disciples were still struggling with it. I mean, that was quite a scene. I think it would take me a while to unpack that one too.

Luckily for us, we have different tools and time to be able to see this with the lens of hindsight and learn from the text what we can as we listen for what Christ is trying to teach us.

This knowledge allows us to be Christ-centered in our own mission as a church as we continue to discern what it means to be a community that strives to be “Christ-centered co-creators with God.”

St. Ben's mission statement reads that “St. Benedict's strives to be an inclusive Christian community that celebrates the divine in all beings, and inspires spiritual growth through joyful, creative sacramental worship, loving service within our congregation and our wider community, thoughtful inquiry through in-depth study and prayer, and commitment to social and environmental justice.” I know I've borne witness to this mission statement in action, as the people of this congregation have come together to care for each other during this time of transition.

While people we love and care deeply about are in the hospital caring for loved ones, have our own family in the hospital, are supporting friends or family with serious illnesses, or maybe dealing with our own serious health issues. Truly, there is a lot going on within our congregation. It's one of the reasons we are having our parish check-in during our potluck today. We want to be able to continue to ground ourselves in the practices of deep love and connection that have kept this congregation strong for so many years.

To continue building on, re-establishing, or even sparking new relationships and networks of care as we continue to take this one day at a time together. The transfiguration reminds us of Jesus's divinity and the mystery of his divine nature. It gives us hope as we "listen to him" and try to follow the path laid before us. Knowing that he walks alongside us on our journey. Even if that path is covered with fog, maybe the next time we see the fog in Los Osos or wherever we are, we might remember the mountaintop and stop, take a moment to pray, and feel the presence of the Trinity among us as we wander along the path.

Doing our best as wonderfully created beloveds of God, knowing that the fog always lifts.

I'd like to close with the serenity prayer, as I've found it brings me comfort when there is a lot going on. Please feel free to join in if you feel so moved.

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. **Amen**