



**SUNNYVALE**

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*From the Pulpit*

**Sermon: “Blessed Assurance”**

The Rev. Karin Kennedy Hejmanowski ~ February 14, 2010

**Luke 9:28-36**

**Exodus 34:29-35**

I’m shocked by how fast time is moving. This past week, Josiah turned one year old—we made it! On his facebook status, my husband stated that this has been the shortest and the longest year of his life! More and more often I find myself reflecting upon how, as a child, I would hear adults say that the years just went by faster and faster as they got older. I really didn’t understand that. I mean, it seemed clear that we all have the same seven days a week and 52 weeks a year, so how could it seem to go faster. Now I realize that that was likely in the same season of life when I was thrilled, when I asked my mom if I could walk to a friend’s house to play, she responded that yes, I could go for half an hour! In contrast, I now pray intensely when I put Josiah down for a nap that it will last longer than 45 minutes so I can get some things done around the house.

I bring this up now because I find it hard to believe that we are about to embark on our communal and individual journey of lent. Just about as hard to believe as it was when the Christmas decorations went up in the stores last October!

But Wednesday is that day indeed. The day we begin the journey toward the cross. And we’ll get to reflect on that more and think about what we want to characterize that journey when we gather here on Wednesday evening for what has become here, as it is elsewhere, a lovely tradition of starting that journey together in a worship service.

Today has its own name. In fact, these three days before Ash Wednesday are called Shrovetide. Today can be called Hall Sunday, that is Hallowed Sunday, designating it as the Sunday before

Ash Wednesday. And it's Transfiguration Sunday. Each day this week before Ash Wednesday has it's own designation. Hall Sunday. Hall Monday. Blue Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday. Or you may be more familiar with Tuesday as Mardi Gras. I'm not sure the intent of the early church fathers and mothers was to have a celebration that night before Ash Wednesday that was a sort of eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we fast sort of celebration, but such it has become.

But today our liturgical linens are white in recognition of Transfiguration Sunday. And our scriptures today are taken from the lectionary which suggests passages for reading each day. Hear the word of the Lord as it comes to us from Luke 9:28 – 36.

#### READ PASSAGE

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

What happens in this passage is, in a very real sense, mysterious. Mysterious and majestic. And it starts by saying that Jesus and his three closest disciples went up on a mountain to pray. Now maybe they'd gotten used to it and maybe it just seemed natural, but I gotta think that praying with Jesus had to be pretty cool. But it's interesting to note that, having climbed this mountain or hill to pray with Jesus, these three devoted disciples proceed to fall asleep. Perhaps it's more than interesting, you may find that encouraging! Our version makes it sound like they stayed awake, but the actual text seems to lead us to believe that they quite fell asleep. And when they awoke, they awoke to this overwhelming and amazing view. Jesus was there, but although they knew it was just the four of them that had walked there together, there were two other men now in conversation with Jesus. And not just that, but they were aglow. They were dazzling.

Now I'm sure you've had the same experience I've had of waking up and not being quite sure where you are because you were so tired when you fell asleep. I've felt that way when getting in late from a flight and going to a hotel or my parents' house or wherever I'm headed. I wake up and I'm a bit groggy and have to remind myself where I am. It's happened when we've moved houses, too. And just this week I watched Josiah wake up in a blur and work to orient himself to what was real and what was happening. But for me, it's always been just a matter of reminding myself of the surroundings. There's nothing surprising, really, just different from what and where I am used to.

But imagine awaking and finding the person you spend the most time with not only talking to people that look like they're wearing the styles of 4,000 years ago, but also finding all three of them dazzling and glowing in some supernatural sort of way.

This was Peter's experience and, being one who we know to have been quick to speak, he spoke while perhaps still in a bit of a stupor. He and James and John have somehow realized that these other men are Moses and Elijah. Earlier we read a passage about Moses and how his face glowed. He was the one who brought the law of God to the people. And Elijah was among the greatest of the prophets. In his stupor, Peter exclaims that they should make monuments by which to remember this. One for each of the three people that were dazzling. He wants to remember this time, and rightly so.

Now Peter doesn't know what it was that Jesus and Moses and Elijah were talking about. He hadn't woken up in time to hear the content of the conversation. I wonder if it would have changed Peter's reaction, if he might have felt more subdued, had he known that in their little triad, they were talking about Jesus' coming departure. That is to say that they were talking about his impending death. They were talking about his journey from the time of their gathering until the crucifixion.

But as Peter speaks, they are enveloped in a cloud. It's one awesome experience after another! I don't know what it was like for them to be enveloped in a cloud, but I picture them on the hill up by the Golden Gate bridge when the clouds begin just to pour over the hills. To them, this would be a quick reminder of the presence of God. It's how God had appeared at times in the past. It's how God had led the people of Israel in the dessert during the daytime. And to be in the close proximity of God is a fearful, awesome thing. Peter's talking came to an abrupt end.

They may have missed the discussion between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, but the next voice was unmistakable. It was God Himself. God confirming the identity of Jesus, in case there was any question. And God commanding them to listen to Jesus.

And then, as quickly as it had seemed to happen, it all disappeared and there they were, just the four of them, on the mountain where they had walked to pray. It's like Lucy in the Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe stepping back out of the wardrobe and finding herself no longer in

Narnia, but back in the spare room of the professor's house. Everything seemed so normal again. And yet, everything had changed.

You've had those moments that change everything. A phone call or an email or a note that just made the world stand still. That for better or worse caused you to realize that life was never going to be the same again.

Peter made a big decision when he decided to follow Jesus as his rabbi. But there were experiences along the journey that emphasized to him just how big of a decision it had been. And this was the most intense such experience yet.

Peter, who always had something to say. Peter, who was known for acting impulsively and rashly. Peter, who wanted things done yesterday. Peter, now, was silent. There was nothing to say. God had spoken and when God speaks, like the EF Hutton commercial of the 80s said, we listen.

I used to have this frustrating experience with my dad. I would say something, no doubt of extreme importance, and he would just continue reading whatever article or screen or document he was reading. Even though I had said, "Dad?" And he had responded, "Yes?" And I took that to mean that he was now ready to interact. I would say whatever it was I wanted him to respond to and he would still be reading. When, finally, I would say, "Dad, did you hear me?" He would pause briefly and then repeat back to me what I had said. It was like the little plaque that had hung in my grandpa's house that said, "I'm not deaf; I'm ignoring you!"

Peter hadn't been ignoring Jesus, but had been either asleep or groggy when the conversation about Jesus' path to Jerusalem and to death took place. But I wonder if now, in light of God's confirmation, if Peter was able to replay some of that conversation in his head. The road to Jerusalem. The path toward the cross. If he recalled it, the gravity of the words would now sink into his soul. What could there possibly be to say? What could there possibly be to say?

And so Peter did something that was rare for him. He kept silent. He went from wanting to erect monuments to remember the event and let everyone know what had happened, to keeping silent about the entire thing. Who could believe it anyway? And he had so much to ponder.

Among the things that Peter and the others had to ponder was the true identity of Jesus. These young Jewish men had agreed to follow Jesus as their rabbi. Already they had seen amazing things and knew he was no average rabbi. But now they've seen him with Moses and Elijah. And while that's cool to us, for two young Jewish men, this was amazing. There could hardly be more confirmation of greatness than being in the presence of the one to whom God had given the ten commandments—Moses--and arguably the greatest prophet of all time, Elijah. But now they've heard the voice of God. It was unmistakable. And God told them. God told them that Jesus was God's Son.

And so they stood and went forward in silence. Not because it was news that wasn't intended to be shared. But because it was so momentous. How does one share that which has just been enveloped in the presence of God. And how does one's heart process that the One Who you are following is knowingly heading down a path toward death? What does it mean to follow such a rabbi?

And that brings us to today. And to this week. What does it mean? What does it mean for us to follow Jesus Christ on this journey through lent toward the cross? How does one follow such a rabbi? Such a savior?

Certainly we follow Jesus Christ on this journey with a blessed assurance that Jesus is the Son of God. And we do it with the blessed assurance the resurrection looms in the future. But today we ponder. We ponder the journey that lies ahead. The journey we will start more fully on Wednesday. We begin the journey toward the cross. A journey filled with the question of what does it mean to follow Jesus. Amen.