

February 14, 2010  
First Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Idaho Falls, Idaho

*Before reading this sermon, I encourage you to first read the texts assigned for this day. Pastor Jeff*

Transfiguration of Our Lord

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36[37-43]

Dear Followers of Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

At my home, we have a 14-year old cat and a 6-month old cat. A couple of weeks ago, I had finished cleaning up the family room and was getting ready to vacuum the carpet. Both cats were laying on the couch. I plugged in the vacuum cleaner and turned it on and as soon as I turned it on, the 6-month old cat jumped off the couch and ran out of the room as fast as he could. He was frightened by the noise of the vacuum cleaner. But the 14-year old cat did not move a muscle. She just continued laying there on the couch, relaxing, looking at peace, and watching me as I vacuumed the carpet. I stopped and looked at her for just a moment. I was just really struck by the two reactions: a 6-month old cat, frightened and fleeing from the noise of the vacuum cleaner. A 14-year old cat, not even distracted by the noise, continuing to relax and be at peace. And I thought to myself, "What a difference it makes to have lived in a home for 14-years as opposed to 6-months. You learn what might need to be feared and what doesn't; what you might need to flee from and what you do not. Knowing the differences brings a lot of peace and rest."

How might this relate to our walk of faith today? Is there a difference between spending 14-years being at home with God as compared to 6-months? Can we expect to experience more peace and rest in our life the longer our heart and soul and life dwells in God?

Moses spent a lot of time with God and God spent a lot of time speaking with Moses. In Exodus, Chapter 33, we read that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.” I just love the imagery that those words bring to my mind. “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”

Being in the presence of God, listening to Him speak, Moses experienced powerful things in his life, including what we heard about today in the reading from Exodus. Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai, having spent a good amount of time with God. As he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When his brother Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.

The people were afraid of Moses with the skin of his face shining. Moses must have seen their reaction of fear upon seeing him, but there is no indication that Moses took off to try and get a look at his face. Instead, he called out to the people and spoke to them and gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. Having spent much time with God, Moses was not afraid and, instead, was at peace. The people, having spent quite a bit less time dwelling with God and, in fact,

having made and worshipped a golden calf instead, are afraid to even come near Moses. Spending more and more time dwelling with God seems to make a difference.

Moving to the reading from Luke, we hear another example of fear in reaction to something God is doing, and this time it is Jesus who, while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appear, talking with Jesus. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

Moses and Elijah have spent much time dwelling with God. Peter, John, and James have shown great faith in leaving behind everything and following Jesus. They are learning more and more about Jesus and what he came to do, but they are still learning. They saw Jesus' glory and Moses and Elijah standing with him. So Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" –not knowing what he said.

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!"

As they continued following Jesus, there would be more moments of fear and they would eventually flee when Jesus was taken captive and crucified. But then, they would spend time with their risen Lord, and their fear would be transformed into great courage, power, and peace as they spread the good news about Jesus' victory over death.

Spending more and more time being at home with our risen Lord and Savior seems to make a difference.

As we look towards Ash Wednesday and the 40-day journey before us, we are invited to spend intentional time with our Savior, Jesus Christ. The season of Lent asks us to remove from our life all those things that separate us from God; to remove all those things other than God that we turn to in order to find peace, purpose, and life. We are asked to make an assessment of our life and determine where are we turning to find peace and rest in the midst of the fears and anxieties of life. Are we striving to find our home in God, letting our heart and mind and soul dwell ever longer and ever deeper in Him? What a difference that made in the life of Moses and Elijah and, ultimately, Peter and John and James.

We come to worship every Sunday, hearing the Word of God and communing with Jesus and one another at the Lord's Supper. Is it true for you that the longer you worship the more you find you are less fearful of the noises in life and the more you experience the peace of God which passes all understanding? I truly hope that is true for you. Yet, I also know there are tensions in our congregation that have kept some of our brothers and sisters in Christ away from worship. Others come carrying a certain amount of pain over the tensions. Others may be trying to figure out what the tensions are all about.

To help us address these tensions in our congregation, the Church Council has asked a group called Common Ground to come to our church and facilitate some small-group conversations in the hopes of bring us healing and opportunities for spiritual growth. You will be invited to sign up for a 30-minute conversation with a representative from Common Ground and to share with these unbiased facilitators what you value about our congregation. What are your hopes? What are your fears? What are your thoughts

on the conflicts and tensions? What are your ideas on how the situation can be improved?

These conversations are separate from our Path Forward work. The goal of the Common Ground conversations is bring to us opportunities for healing and spiritual growth in the midst of the tensions in our congregation. They are not about changing anyone's perspectives or decisions on the issues. They are about listening to you to re-discover where we have common ground in our life together and to invite opportunities for healing and spiritual growth. In the bulletin, you will find more information and sign up sheets will be available next Sunday.

As we enter into the season of Lent and think about our walk with Jesus and assess in our own life the things that bring us anxiety and fear and make us want to flee to things other than God to find true life, I am praying for you and praying that you will sign up for a time to speak with Common Ground. I believe it will bring to us as individuals and to us as the people of this congregation, spiritual growth and a closer walk with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as we seek to live ever deeper with our Savior.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.