

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my joy... Amen...

If you have ever been on a hiking excursion, you know the importance of a backpack. My backpack is usually filled with my favorite snacks, water, my cell phone, some first-aid supplies, and if I am not familiar with the area, a map.

I have also been on longer hiking trips, which require a larger backpack, more gear, clothing, a tent, and sometimes even a canoe...

And, my very first backpacking outing as a kid, even involved my parents dragging for many miles... a cooler on wheels...

All of these experiences have taught me the importance of intentionality, because the things we bring are things we have to carry, drag, or pull.

They have also taught me the importance of having a destination point and how supportive a map can be.

And my husband, in particular, loves maps... From hike trips, to bike trips, to road trips, he loves to document the journeys we have been on.

And today's gospel reads like one of those maps, a well-loved map, marking a faith journey throughout time.

And this gospel has yet another dimension about it, bursting from the pages like a 3-d topographical map... Bringing to life mountaintops expanding into the heavens.

Mountaintops that echo throughout the Old Testament with sacred moments between God and Moses, and God and Elijah, both of whom marvelously appear in our gospel today.

Encouraging us to pull out our well-loved and living map of faith... Tracing throughout time a journey... Where we can find the Mountaintop in Exodus,

when Moses met God in the form of a burning bush that was not consumed...

And if we look again, more mountaintops will sprout up between God and Moses. As Moses made several trips up the mountain to meet God...

Some of you might recall the mountain when Moses received the 10 commandments, others might remember our reading from Deuteronomy today, when Moses stayed with God for 40 days and 40 nights.

And if we continue along our faith map, we will spot the mountaintop where Elijah encountered God in the sound of sheer silence...

And after that even more mountains materialize... Mountains that Jesus climbed. From preaching his Sermon on the Mount, to our Gospel today...

And, if we dig deep enough into this passage, perhaps we can even let our map unfurl out into the distance...

Where we find the shadow of a mountain... Or perhaps the shadow of a hill...

As Jesus died on a hill outside of Jerusalem... A time that Jesus foretold his disciples today. A time yet to take place for him, but a time we all know. As this was the hill where God was revealed to a Centurion through Jesus' death.

So, what do all of these hills and mountains mean?

Maybe God simply likes mountains... And therefore, God likes to reveal Godself on mountaintops.

Or perhaps, it means that God is present in creation, in places that we find majestic, grandiose, and beautiful.

Or perhaps, its God's way of saying that before we see God face to face, we need to embark on a journey.

A journey that will require challenges like making it up the side of a mountain. A journey that will be exhausting at times.

A journey that will be unimaginably gorgeous and breathtaking along the way.

A journey that will lead to shimmering moments of God being revealed in our midst, like the transfiguration of Christ...

Moments we can cling to, filling us with hope for the trek ahead.

Which is why we observe the transfiguration of Christ today, as it is the last Sunday before lent...

The transfiguration embodies God's glory in creation... Radiating from our map, leaping off of the page and flooding our spirits with light and fuel for the journey down the mountainside and into lent.

Because lent is not a time just to get through, lent is a time to radically embrace life.

Because Lent ends with something radical, Jesus' journey to the cross and the empty tomb...

Which calls us into reflection, with the lingering reality check that mortality hovers in our midst...

A time if you will, to unpack your bags...

To take inventory of what you have been carrying around, and why you have been carrying it.

To take an honest look and wonder, does this need to be in my pack?

Which is hard...

As we tend to carry things that fill us with a false sense of security and control...

And lent is that uncomfortable reminder that we are not in control, as we are but dust...

But that is not the end of who we are... As there is one thing we can never unpack or be separated from...

The promises we receive at baptism... Namely that you are loved, that you belong to God, and in all your brokenness, you are forgiven.

At baptism you are marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever...

The same cross you will receive on Ash Wednesday.

Which is fitting for our journey today... As today's Gospel reveals God speaking the same words from Jesus' baptism... This is my son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased.

Weaving our baptismal promises into the mortality of Ash Wednesday, and beyond.

Revealing that God is intentional.

And today's gospel is intentional for where we are in the church year.

Today is an important spot on our map and a transitional point in our journey.

And it is a reminder that we also need to be intentional...

Intentional with what we carry.

Intentional of sharing things in our pack with others, especially those in need.

And intentional of what things we need to let go...

And to do this hard work, we have the inspiration of Christ's transfiguration.

A time when Christ's light burst into creation, showing that with God transformation is possible.

And by dwelling in this spot on our map, we too are saturated in the light of Christ.

Light that can illuminate your path and transform your way. By igniting a fire in your bones, and strengthening your footsteps on your way down the mountainside and into lent.

Shedding light on the countless journeys others have made down the mountainside, glowing from within...

Because we have a well-loved and living map. A map that reveals glorious mountaintops, unsettling wilderness treks, and tear-filled valleys.

Revealing that every space you tread, you are not alone.

Even when the map is blurry and the future unclear, our destination point is certain.

A destination point that can inform your actions and the path you take now...

Knowing that when your pack is filled just right, your load will be light and you will have more than enough for the journey ahead, opening the next page to the transformative work of God... Amen.