

February 28, 2024
In Community With All The Saints, Vespers Service
6:30 p.m.

St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, ELCA

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WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

Blessed be the Holy Trinity † one God, who journeys with us these forty days, and sustains us with the gift of grace. **Amen.**

OPENING DIALOGUE

Behold, unveiled the vesper skies: the evening has begun.

Let prayer and praise like incense rise as sets the golden sun.

How blest are you, all loving God, who weaves both day and night.

A starry mantle for our road, the shadow and the light.

Stay with us, Christ, our rest prepare as labor ebbs with night.

And holy dreams woven with prayer till dawns the splendid light.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

God desires truth in our inward being, receiving us as we are, broken and flawed. Seeking God's mercy, let us confess our sins before God.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Gracious God,

Have mercy on us. We confess that we have turned away from you, knowingly and unknowingly. We have wandered from your abundant life. We have strayed from your love for all people. Turn us back to you. Give us new hearts and right spirits, that we may find what is pleasing to you, and dwell in your house forever. Amen.

Receive this good news: God turns to you in love. Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Beneath the Cross of Jesus

1 Be - neath the cross of Je - sus I long to take my stand;
2 Up - on the cross of Je - sus, my eye at times can see
3 I take, O cross, your shad - ow for my a - bid - ing place;

the shad - ow of a might - y rock with - in a wea - ry land,
the ver - y dy - ing form of one who suf - fered there for me.
I ask no oth - er sun - shine than the sun - shine of his face;

a home with - in a wil - der - ness, a rest up - on the way,
And from my con - trite heart, with tears, two won - ders I con - fess:
con - tent to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss,

from the burn - ing of the noon - tide heat and bur - dens of the day,
the . . . won - der of his glo - rious love and my un - wor - thi - ness.
my . . . sin - ful self my on - ly shame, my glo - ry all, the cross.

Text: Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1830-1869
Music: ST. CHRISTOPHER, Frederick C. Maker, 1844-1927

PRAYER

Timeless One,

You renew your promises in every generation. Deepen our awareness of the communion of saints who have gone before us, the saints in our own time, and the saints who will carry on your message of grace after us. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

READING: Revelation 7:9-17

⁹After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." ¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" ¹⁴I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. ¹⁶They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON

Shall We Gather at the River



1 Shall we gath - er at the riv - er, where bright an - gel feet have trod,
2 On the mar - gin of the riv - er, wash - ing up its sil - ver spray,
3 Ere we reach the shin - ing riv - er, lay we ev - 'ry bur - den down;
4 Soon we'll reach the shin - ing riv - er, soon our pil - grim - age will cease;



with its crys - tal tide for - ev - er flow - ing by the throne of God?
we will walk and wor - ship ev - er, all the hap - py gold - en day,
grace our spir - its will de - liv - er, and pro - vide a robe and crown.
soon our hap - py hearts will quiv - er with the mel - o - dy of peace.

Refrain



Yes, we'll gath - er at the riv - er, the beau - ti - ful, the beau - ti - ful riv - er;



gath - er with the saints at the riv - er that flows by the throne of God.

Text: Robert Lowry, 1826-1899
Music: HANSON PLACE, Robert Lowry

PRAYERS

God is our light and our salvation,

Our refuge and our stronghold.

From the rising of the sun to its setting,

We praise your name, O God.

For with you is the fountain of life,

And in your light, we see light.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy God, you are with us both day and night, in twilight, sunrise, and sunset. With your watchful eye and loving heart, comfort all your creation this night. Tend your ailing ones, sooth your suffering ones, hold your grieving ones, guard your little ones. Rest your weary ones, heal afflicted ones, raise your fallen ones, and guide your searching ones. Watchful God,

Hear our prayer.

You fashioned a world in which lands and waterways, plants and animals, together meet the needs of all that you made. We pray that such vitality may blossom around the globe. Bless those who work the soil and who manage animals. Uphold their cities, towns, and villages. Nurture bees and other pollinators. Protect farmlands and ranches from drought and flood. Free children from forced labor in the fields. Grant an economy that can sustain those families who treasure rural life. Teach us how to share with everyone the benefits of each harvest, and accept our gratitude for all the sustenance you provide. Creator God,

Hear our prayer.

You have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you. Gather us together now with all your saints and through the power of your Holy Spirit teach us to pray, how Jesus taught.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

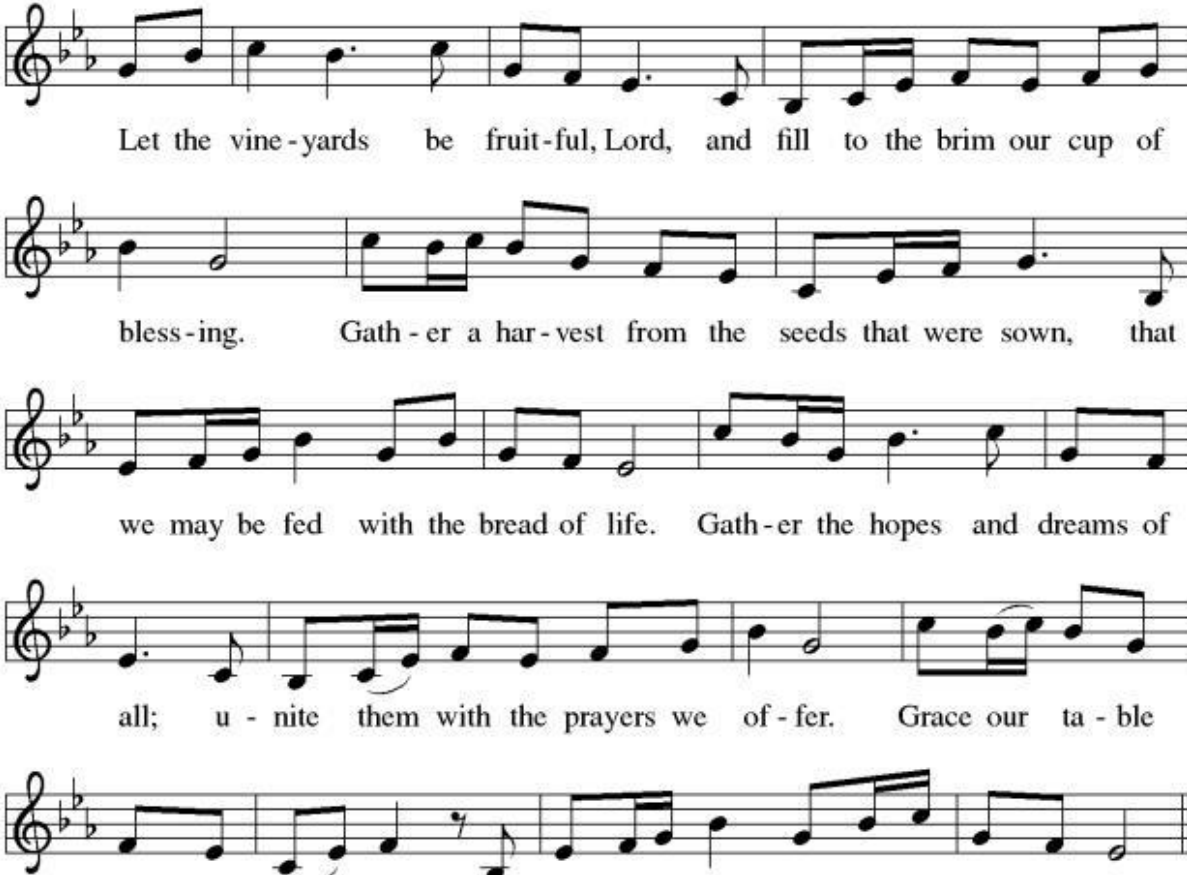
And also with you.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

The God who speaks and summons the earth into being now speaks to us, calling us to offer of ourselves.

Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful

Offering Song



Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of
bless-ing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that
we may be fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of
all; u-nite them with the prayers we of-fer. Grace our ta-ble
with your pres-ence, and give us a fore-taste of the feast to come.

Text: John W. Arthur, 1922-1980

Music: Ronald A. Nelson, b. 1927

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OFFERING PRAYER

Gracious God,

Our treasures come only from you. It is only through your goodness, that we have received so much. We came into this life with nothing, and we leave the same way. Guide us, and inspire us, to share ourselves and the resources we have. May these offerings be used for the goodness of your creation.

Amen.

BLESSING

May God wrap you in love each night, providing you peace and rest,
And while you sleep may God weave strength & courage into every breath.
May you meet the morning with resilient vigor, ready for come what may,
And may the light of Christ fill your heart with joy every single day.
May the Spirit shine on you with favor, love, and never-ending grace
And may the Three In ✠ One, bless you on this Lenten journey,
And in every single place.

Amen.

Rise Up, O Saints of God!

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Rise Up, O Saints of God!'. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are printed below the treble staff of each system. The first system contains five numbered lines of lyrics. The second system contains two lines of lyrics. The music is written in a simple, hymn-like style with block chords and moving lines.

1 Rise up, O saints of God! From vain am - bi - tions turn;
2 Speak out, O saints of God! De - spair en - gulf's earth's frame;
3 Rise up, O saints of God! The king - dom's task em - brace;
4 Give heed, O saints of God! Cre - a - tion cries in pain;
5 Com - mit your hearts to seek the paths which Christ has trod;

Christ rose tri - um - phant that your hearts with no - bler zeal might burn.
as heirs of God's bap - tis - mal grace, the word of hope pro - claim.
re - dress sin's cru - el con - se - quence; give jus - tice larg - er place.
stretch forth your hand of heal - ing now, with love the weak sus - tain.
and, quick - ened by the Spir - it's pow'r, rise up, O saints of God!

Text: Norman O. Forness, b. 1936
Music: FESTAL SONG, William H. Walter, 1825-1893
Text © Norman O. Forness, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

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DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve in love.

Thanks be to God.

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Reflection for today’s theme: in community with all the saints:

- Who is one person whose life and faith has influenced yours?
- How do you hope to shape and influence the faith of future generations?

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Lenten Devotional, from ELCA World Hunger (taken from)

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA_World_Hunger_Lent_Study_2024.pdf

Devotional on Transfiguration

This week’s recommended readings: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31
Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38; or Mark 9:2-9

This week in Lent we continue exploring the places and moments in which we encounter God, reflecting on transfiguration as recounted in Mark 9:2-9. Here God’s manifest presence before the disciples demonstrates God’s presence in the life of creation, especially in times of injustice. “Transfiguration” is an odd word telling an odd story. The word comes from two Latin roots — “trans,” meaning “across,” and “figura,” meaning “shape” — so it indicates a change in shape or form. Its occurrence in this week’s reading from Mark is one of the few times it appears in the Christian Scriptures.

The story is a little strange. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain. There he is revealed in all his glory, in dazzling clothes, with the spirits of Elijah and Moses beside him and God claiming him as God’s own son. Curiously, this experience of Jesus’ divine glory occurs immediately after his long speech about the suffering he will soon endure on the cross. Is it any wonder the disciples are depicted as confused?

Peter is often portrayed in the gospels as well-intentioned but foolish, a far cry from the confident leader he will become in the early church. In Mark’s story, Peter just doesn’t get it. Amid this mystical experience on a mountaintop, Peter, like some rabid suburban developer, suggests, “Hey, let’s build some houses and just stay.”

But Peter may not be quite as dense as we readers first assume. Peter is the one who reminds us that, even during a mountaintop experience, we never cease to be human. Peter is the one who says, “Jesus, I know your clothes are all shiny, and it looks like you got some ghosts with you, and yeah, I hear God talking, too, but we’re all up on top of a mountain right now, and if we’re going to spend any time here, we’re going to need some shelter.” Peter’s reaction isn’t one of fear or stupidity. It’s the reaction of a human being who can’t forget the physical realities that continually impinge on even the deepest spiritual moments.

Like Peter, we are confronted by physical realities that we cannot ignore, even as we experience a profound spiritual crisis of yearning for the day when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Like Peter on the mountain, we need to be brought into that ecstatic reality where the presence of God among us is revealed. But also like Peter, we can't just stay in that moment, ignoring the reality of lived, physical need. We must have a different kind of faith, a faith that refuses to separate transfiguration from transformation, to ignore people around us who are assailed by injustice, disease and violence. We need a faith that captivates, motivates and activates us to respond boldly and recklessly when God invites us to be part of the transformation being enacted for all creation.

In the event of transfiguration we encounter God where the physical and the spiritual intersect. New Testament scholar Dorothy Lee puts it well:

[T]he transfiguration is not an other-worldly narrative, disconnected from the body and ordinary human experience. On the contrary, it is precisely Jesus' transfigured body that discloses the face of God and the hope of God's future. ... The transfiguration on the mountain is the meeting-place between human beings and God, between the temporal and the eternal ... between everyday human life — with all its hopes and fears — and the mystery of God.

Peter's suggestion of building shelters doesn't seem all that far-fetched when we recognize that Jesus never ceases to be a physical human being, even as the transfiguration discloses him as also divine. Peter isn't missing the story. According to Lee, the story is really about him — and us.

To encounter God in transfiguration is to experience those moments when our perception is opened up radically to the presence of God in our midst. Jesus' transfigured body births a transfigured faith — a faith that holds in tension the holy and the ordinary, the spiritual and the physical. The story of the transfiguration in Mark isn't the story of Jesus experiencing his own divinity. Nor is it the story of some important consultation Jesus had with Moses and Elijah. We don't even know what they said! Rather it is the story of the disciples encountering God in their own physical midst, represented by Jesus' body and clothing, and in their own history, as represented by Moses and Elijah. It is the story of a faith that opens them to encounter God in their past, present and future, as Lee suggests.

What does this mean for us today? What does it mean to live with a transfigured faith? For over three years Church World Service (CWS), with support from ELCA World Hunger, has provided child protection services to unaccompanied children in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Living in a foreign land without parents or relatives by their side, these vulnerable children are on a difficult journey, trying to reach a better future. Many of them have come to live by a simple but devastating principle: "Do not trust people." They build walls around themselves to keep safe from those who would take advantage of them, but these walls also bring anxiety, depression and a deep skepticism of adults or agencies trying to help them.

One of the youth helped by CWS is Ahmed (name changed for privacy). Ahmed left his home in Burundi two years ago, relying on money his parents had raised for him to travel to Croatia.

When CWS met him, he had been living in Bosnia and Herzegovina for almost a year. “I left with six friends, all from Burundi,” he says. “We watched hungry people every day [in Burundi], and we were among them. I am the oldest, so I am responsible for my brothers. My father is sick, so he cannot work. I need to help them.”

Along the way Ahmed faced steep challenges, including physical violence and intimidation by police at the Croatian border. “Go back where you came from!” they yelled as they pushed him. “How can I go back,” Ahmed says, “when my family’s survival depends on me going forward?”

Ahmed’s story is, tragically, not unique. Like many others, he carries the weight of his journey, his yearning for home and his frustrated hope for a future in Europe. By the time CWS staff met him, Ahmed was making his ninth attempt to enter Croatia. After providing him with whatever help they could, they watched him go, hoping that, this time, the journey would be successful.

A transfigured faith — shaped by an encounter with the God who transforms our world and our perspective — changes us. To encounter Jesus transfigured is to remember that God has entered human history, that God plays a role in the story of unaccompanied children. But encountering Jesus transfigured also means remembering the physical as well as the spiritual, to say, with Peter, “We should build some shelter here.” Ahmed’s fears and disappointment don’t vanish just because God is part of his story. Nor are Ahmed’s tired feet miraculously soothed.

To carry a transfigured faith into the world, to bear witness to our encounter with God in transfiguration, impels us radically outward to seek God in the real people and events around us. This faith is grounded in the belief that God is present with us through the Galilean carpenter — and through a Burundian child. All too often, migrants such as Ahmed are viewed as nothing more than a burden or an intrusion: “Go back where you came from!” he was told. Yet a transfigured faith reminds us that our neighbors are more than burdens or disturbances, more than even their own need; to us they are the presence of God, just as we are to one another.

Encountering God in transfiguration is more than an odd event on a mountaintop 2,000 years ago. God transfigures our faith and perception, opening us to recognize God in our neighbors and to perceive God active in our history. After Peter, James and John reach the mountaintop, there is no going back. Jesus is no ordinary teacher they are following. This is something new, something miraculously and wonderfully different. Here is the unveiling of divinity, transforming their lives and how they view the world.

As we journey together spiritually through Lent, let us do so with a transfigured faith, remembering the difficult, dangerous, physical journeys so many of our neighbors are on and remembering our call to be present with them and one another, to be changed by the presence of God within them.

Reflection questions:

- How would you have reacted if you were on the mountain with Peter, James and John?
- With the transfiguration of Jesus, the disciples come to see Christ's divinity. How might this have changed their understanding of what it meant to be a disciple?
- How does a transfigured faith, recognizing the ways God is present in our world and one another, change us?
- How can the church confront and change people's negative perception of neighbors such as Ahmed? What difference might this make?