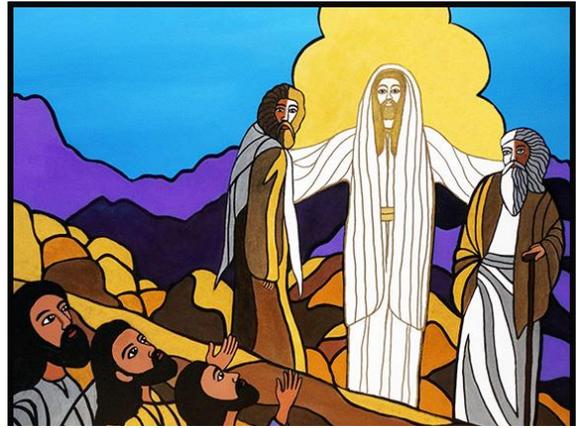


**Sunday, February 14, 2021**  
**Sermon: Transfiguration Sunday**  
**Pastor Adam Ericksen**  
**Clackamas United Church of Christ**

Let me just say a few words about today being Valentine's Day and also Transfiguration Sunday, the day when Jesus takes his disciples, Peter, James, and John, up the mountain and they see him transformed into this spiritual state. It's rare that February 14<sup>th</sup>, Valentine's Day, comes on the same Sunday as Transfiguration Sunday. I do think that they have something to do with each other that I think is interesting and important in our understanding of who God is.



*Transfiguration Sunday*

Tradition tells us that Valentine's Day is named after Saint Valentine, a man who lived during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Roman Empire during a time where there were sporadic persecutions of Christians. Saint Valentine was a priest and interestingly the Emperor, during the time when Saint Valentine lived, was a man named Emperor Claudius II. Emperor Claudius gave a decree that the young men of the Empire were to not get married because Claudius wanted the men to join the military so that they could expand Rome's Empire and protect Rome from potential enemies. Claudius thought that if men got married and had a wife and a family that it would distract them from military service. Isn't that a good distraction? So Saint Valentine entered into this moment of history and he disobeyed this decree by the Emperor, he resisted the government of his time.

Now, there are some Christians who say that Christianity is not supposed to be political, not supposed to resist unjust political systems but friends, throughout the Bible and throughout Christian history, we have had people just like Saint Valentine who have known these unjust political decrees and have resisted. Saint Valentine offered to marry people who wanted to get married and disobey this political decree. Emperor Claudius found out about Saint Valentine and, here's an image, when you celebrate Valentine's Day you may have seen these images, memes on social media of what Claudius did. Claudius locked Saint Valentine in jail and then cut off his head. Persecution, real persecution. This is not about baking cakes for gay people, that is not persecution. The early church experienced this kind of persecution. The risks that the early church took in disobeying unjust decrees could have been death as we see from Saint Valentine who risked bringing more love into the world despite the risks that it might bring to his life.

That's the origins of Valentine's Day and you may have seen the memes on social media where two people are eating Valentine's Day dinner and they bring the head of Saint Valentine to them on a platter - Happy Valentine's Day! This is what we are celebrating. Love is risky. God's love meets us in the pits where we may be, the depth of despair where we may be, and it challenges us. It invites us to enter into those depths with one another and bring God's transformative love with us. That's what Saint Valentine was about and that is what the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain is about, as well, and I will briefly tell you why.

Peter and James and John go up the mountain and they see Jesus transformed. Moses and Elijah, the two prophets, one a lawgiver and one a prophet - two major figures in the Hebrew scriptures, are there with Jesus and they're talking. Moses and Elijah disappear and the disciples hear the voice of God come to them and say, "This is my beloved son, God's son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

Listen to him. Listen to him. Those words are so easy to just skip over but they are so important because who we listen to matters. What we pay attention to matters. Kindness is a practice that we learn by going through difficult times. But we don't necessarily have to learn kindness. We can get better. We can become more kind. But depending on who we listen to, we can also succumb to bitterness. We can also succumb to anxiety. We can also succumb to hate. And so God comes to the disciples as God comes to us and says, "Listen to Jesus." Let Jesus be your model for how God is in the world. Why? Because Moses and Elijah are fantastic, wonderful prophets, but even they had moments where they didn't see God clearly. Even in the Bible, you find moments where God does not act like Jesus. Notice that God doesn't come to the disciples and say, "Listen to Jesus and also listen to these parts of the Bible, as well." He says, "Listen to Jesus." Jesus is the one that we are to listen to.

They just had this experience with Moses and Elijah and God doesn't say to listen to Moses and Elijah, too. Don't get me wrong, they have wonderful things to teach us, but Moses killed people, Elijah killed people, as well. Divine violence runs throughout the Bible. That's why God doesn't say, "Listen to Moses, listen to Elijah, listen to the Bible." God says, "Listen to Jesus." And Jesus says to the disciples that God's love is moving in our world and it doesn't promise us protection, it doesn't promise us that everything is going to be successful in our lives, it doesn't promise success, but it does promise us a community of love. It does promise us that God will be with us when we go through despair. It does promise that we will not be alone. It promises that as you are going through transitions in your life, that even when Christians, even when our parents, completely miss the message because they haven't been listening to the Jesus who calls us to love everyone - all of our neighbors, including our LGBTQIA neighbors.

When Christians miss the point and they start condemning our neighbors, know that you are loved. Know that God created the seed of a flower because it would transition to grow beyond the seed that it was created to be, into the beautiful flower that it would become. That is you. God loves you.

Friends, on this Valentine's Day I want you to know that the risks of love are there but it is worth taking the risk like Saint Valentine did. Like Jesus did before him. Like Mary did. Like Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, did. It is worth taking that risk. May we take the risk together as we support one another. Amen.