

“Changing Times”
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Transfiguration Sunday
Higganum Congregational Church
First Congregational Church of Haddam

Exodus 24:12-18

¹² The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” ¹³ So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴ To the elders he had said, “Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.”

¹⁵ Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶ The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. ¹⁷ Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. ¹⁸ Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I^[a] will make three dwellings^[b] here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved;^[c] with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

This morning my meditation is going to launch with something of a group effort, if you’ll bear with me. I’d like to ask you please to introduce yourself to a couple people near you forming small groups of three or four. Ideally, your group might include some older and some younger people. As an ice breaker, ask one another how many telephone numbers they have memorized.

Ok, now please discuss in your groups:

- How did people get around when you were born?
- And then, when your grandparents were born.

If we here this morning, as I think, represent Greatest and Silent Generation members born before 1945, Baby Boomers born between 1946 and the mid-1960’s, GenXers and Xennials like

myself born in the following 20 years, and Millennials, GenZers and Gen Alphas born after about 1981, our answers inclusive of our grandparents probably range from horse-drawn carriages to safety bicycles to street trolleys to automobiles and jet planes.

We could observe similarly dramatic changes if we discussed how people listen to music. Edison's phonograph was patented in 1878. The first wireless entertainment broadcast was on Christmas Eve of 1906. The race to obsolescence sped up as time went by: cassette tapes debuted in 1962 and had a two-decade run before Sony started selling CD players. The first iPods went on the market in 2001, and Spotify launched just seven years later. These days I understand it's even passé to have wires on one's headphones.

There have been farmers and teachers and families since human history began. But the fields of agriculture and education today might hardly be recognizable to our great grandparents, and how we think about childrearing and eldercare, dating, marriage, and divorce, work and finances, housekeeping, diet, medicine- all these and more have undergone such significant transformations so quickly that it's no wonder we have trouble keeping up. When Kiplinger renamed his finance advice newsletter "Changing Times" in 1947, he was onto something.

(It's not called that anymore. Even that changed!)

The disorienting pace of change during our lifetimes probably is why I sympathize so with Peter in our Transfiguration story. Confronted with a dramatic shift, he alone of the three dares to respond: he blurts out his proposal about building three dwelling places for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

It's kind of brilliant- informed by tradition, attempting to be responsive to events at hand, generous, and yet still nothing like what the situation requires.

Let me fill that in a bit. When I say 'informed by tradition,' I'm referring to the fact that when Moses with his disciple Joshua somewhere near encountered God's glory on the seventh day as recorded in the Exodus passage we heard, the next thing that happened was that God gave instructions for the creation of the Tabernacle and the Tent of Meeting.

Peter has been paying attention in Sabbath school: on that seventh day when he sees Moses and the light of God in Jesus, he offers to do what Israel had been commanded, to build a place for Holiness to dwell among the people.

Peter isn't stuck in the religious life he's grown up with; faced with the changes before his eyes he is prepared to relinquish attachment to the Jerusalem Temple and return to something like the time of desert wandering that saw the formation of Israel.

When I say he is generous, I mean not only that Peter offers hospitality and his labor to the three dignitaries, but also that his idea of keeping Moses and Elijah and Jesus there in their new houses would extend this time of glorious fellowship and allow everyone- the other disciples not in this select group of three and perhaps the crowds as well- to have the opportunity to witness for themselves what he and James and John have experienced.

But in spite of his faithfulness, in spite of his having caught onto the need to change in response to changing times, in spite of his willingness to exert himself to extend this whole amazing whatever-it-is, Peter's idea flops. It's overruled, overwritten, when God's own voice is heard commending Jesus and commanding Peter and the others *_not_* to build tabernacles, but to "listen to him," to listen to Jesus.

I'm sure it was meant as a general instruction, to listen to everything Jesus said, but it's interesting nonetheless to look and see that the next things Jesus says in the passage.

The first is: "*Get up and do not be afraid.*" What would it mean personally and for our churches for us to stand on our feet and to feel confident of God's protection and promise?

The second is: "*Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.*" We who live on this side of Easter hear this as "*Tell others about the vision.*" How would our lives and our congregations be transfigured if we "listened" to this directive?

Observers have noted that the four main adult generations currently present in the church may put a priority on different things in their faith lives. Members of the Silent Generation are said to seek Sanctuary, Boomers to want Vision; Xers to value Relationship, and Millennials to desire Authenticity.

How do we experience God as Refuge and Sanctuary?

What is the Vision God has allowed us as individuals and congregations to see?

What does the touch of Jesus and walking in Relationship with him up and down the mountains and through the valleys of our lives mean to us?

What are our experiences of Authentic faith, transformation, renewal, and hope?

Perhaps our various generations can explore these questions over our [Mardi Gras Breakfast] pancakes in some of these same small groups.

People say "we live in changing times," but it is even truer to say "we come to life in times of change." The Greek word translated "Transfiguration" is *metamorphosis*, a word we reserve for transformations that reveal a previously invisible but inherent aspect of identity. Caterpillars into butterflies, tadpoles into frogs are recreated, but still themselves. They take flight or take to land in their new incarnations because they know instinctively this is where the fullness of their future lies.

We as God's people must dare to enter the dazzling cloud of the presence, must lose ourselves in it to find our way, and find ourselves, just as our faithful ancestors were brave to do. Our times demand it, and our God is able and faithful to meet and guide us. Amen and amen.