

**TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD**  
**FEBRUARY 23, 2020**  
**MATTHEW 17: 1-9**  
**“LIVING BETWEEN FAITH AND FEAR”**

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

- ANXIETY HAS BEEN STEADILY CLIMBING IN OUR COUNTRY FOR FOUR DECADES. THE UNITED STATES IS THE MOST ANXIOUS NATION IN THE WORLD. THERE IS LESS ANXIETY AMONG THE PEOPLE OF COLOMBIA OR NIGERIA.
- 63% OF US ARE ANXIOUS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY. 62% OF US ARE ANXIOUS ABOUT MONEY.
  - FOR EXAMPLE, THE OFFICIAL POVERTY LINE FOR A FAMILY OF FOUR IS \$26,200, BUT IT ACTUALLY TAKES \$58,000 FOR A FAMILY OF FOUR TO JUST GET BY.
- 51% OF US ARE ANXIOUS ABOUT VIOLENCE AND CRIME.
  - IT’S FANTASTIC THAT THE MILLVALE POLICE SPEND TIME IN OUR LOBBY AND OTHER CHURCH LOBBIES EVERY SUNDAY, BUT WHEN DID THAT BECOME ROUTINE?

- 60% OF US ARE ANXIOUS BECAUSE WE BELIEVE OUR COUNTRY IS AT ITS LOWEST POINT IN OUR HISTORY.
- SO, AGAIN IT'S NOT SURPRISING THAT ALMOST 60% OF US ARE ANXIOUS BECAUSE WE CHECK THE NEWS EVERY DAY. CLEARLY, IF YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, TURN OFF YOUR TV, STOP READING THE NEWSPAPER, AND DELETE THE NEWS FEED ON YOUR PHONE.
- AND, PERHAPS CONNECTED TO ALL OF THE ABOVE, ALMOST 50% OF US REPORT LYING AWAKE AT NIGHT, A SYMPTOM OF ANXIETY.
- AND THEN CONSIDER TWO SUBGROUPS WITHIN OUR CULTURE:
  - ONE IN THREE CHILDREN LIVE WITH SIGNIFICANT DEPRIVATION: INSUFFICIENT FOOD, SERIOUSLY OVERCROWDED HOUSING, AND LACK OF MEDICAL CARE. IT'S SAD TO THINK OF THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ARE MEDICATED BECAUSE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.
  - AND, THE MORE I SPEAK WITH YOUNG ADULTS, I HEAR SERIOUS ANXIETY: THE MILLIONS STILL LIVING AT HOME BECAUSE THERE ARE NOT JOBS THAT SUPPORT AN INDEPENDENT LIFESTYLE. OTHER JOBS PROVIDE LITTLE OR NO HEALTH CARE BENEFITS. THERE IS CRUSHING STUDENT DEBT. MANY LIVE IN DESPAIR, WHICH WE COULD CONSIDER A MORE DEADLY FORM OF ANXIETY, BECAUSE THE FUTURE IS SO BLEAK. THE WORLD IS RADICALLY DIFFERENT FOR YOUNG ADULTS OR EVEN MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS, THAN IT WAS FOR US BABY BOOMERS. INSTEAD OF EACH SUCCEEDING GENERATION HAVING ACCESS TO A BETTER LIFE, EACH SUCCEEDING GENERATION NOW LOOKS FORWARD TO HAVING LESS OF EVERYTHING.
- THE DISPARITY BETWEEN THE WEALTHY AND THE POOR CONTINUES TO GROW.
  - FOR EXAMPLE, IN OUR APP-FILLED, SERVICE-ORIENTED WORLD, YOU CAN NOW BECOME A GROCERY SHOPPER FOR THE RICH, USING YOUR OWN CAR AND GAS, OF COURSE. AND YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO GET MORE CLIENTS IS DEPENDENT ON YOUR RATINGS FROM THE CLIENTS. SO, OUT OF THEIR OWN POCKETS, THE SHOPPERS ARE URGED TO BUY FOOD GIFTS FOR THE CLIENT—CALLED “MAGIC”—SO AS TO UP THE CHANCES FOR A GOOD RATING.

- IN WHAT IS A VICIOUS CYCLE, WE KNOW, PSYCHOLOGICALLY, THAT WE HUMANS CANNOT BEAR DAILY ANXIETY WITHOUT SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES., BOTH MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY.
- CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY REVEALS THAT WE HUMANS WILL DO JUST ABOUT ANYTHING TO TRY AND QUIET EXTREME ANXIETY, WHICH WE CALL *DISINTEGRATION ANXIETY*.
- BECAUSE ANXIETY IS FIRST AND FOREMOST OUR SOUL'S SIGNAL THAT WE ARE APPROACHING THE POINT OF DISINTEGRATING EMOTIONALLY—FALLING APART.
- WE DEFINITELY CAN SUFFER THE STRAW THAT BREAKS THE CAMEL'S BACK—THAT LAST TERRIBLE THING, HOWEVER SMALL, THAT CAUSES US TO CRUMBLE—IN TEARS, IN RAGE, IN VIOLENCE, IN EMPTY DEPRESSION.
- AND WE WILL DO ANYTHING TO STOP THIS FEELING. A COMPASSIONATE UNDERSTANDING OF DISINTEGRATION ANXIETY HELPS US UNDERSTAND THAT EXCESSIVE USE OF ALCOHOL, DRUGS, GAMBLING, SEX, AND FOOD ARE ALL DESPERATE AND LAST-DITCH ATTEMPTS TO STAVE OFF MENTAL COLLAPSE....
- THE BIBLICAL WORD FOR ANXIETY IS FEAR.
- AND, FORTY-TWO TIMES IN THE FOUR GOSPELS, JESUS OR AN ANGEL SAYS TO US, "DO NOT BE AFRAID." ALTHOUGH I'VE NOT COUNTED MYSELF, I HAVE READ THAT THE BIBLE IN ITS ENTIRETY HAS 365 STATEMENTS ABOUT NOT BEING AFRAID. ONE-A-DAY. ALMOST LIKE A DAILY ANTI-VITAMIN. BUT FEAR OR ANXIETY IS OUR DAILY COMPANION.
- IN THE LUTHERAN UNDERSTANDING OF PREACHING AND TEACHING, THIS IS THE BAD NEWS WHICH ALWAYS PRECEEDS THE GOOD NEWS.
- AND WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS ANTIDOTE?
- SCRIPTURE SAYS "WITHOUT A VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH."
- AND THIS SUSTAINING AND CALMING VISION IS TWOFOLD.

- FIRST, THERE IS THE TRANSFIGURED CHRIST ON THE HIGH MOUNTAIN **(SLIDE OF CHRIST ON THE MOUNTAIN)**.
- THE TRANSFIGURED CHRIST LEADS PAUL TO WRITE THAT THERE IS ONLY CHRIST. "HE IS EVERYTHING AND IS IN EVERYTHING." **(SLIDE WITH THIS SAYING)**
- THE VISION OF HIS FACE SHINING LIKE THE SUN AND HIS CLOTHES BECOMING AS WHITE AS LIGHT."
- AND THIS TRANSFIGURED CHRIST POURS HIS LIFE OUT INTO EVERYTHING: THE SUNSET, OUR CHILDREN, YOUR PARTNER IN LIFE, LAUGHTER, THE BREAD AND WINE, THE COW IN THE MEADOW, OUR VOICES AS WE SING TOGETHER, THE SPARROW, THE GRASS UNDER OUR FEET, THE LIFE THAT WE SUFFER, WHEREVER LOVE APPEARS. AND EVEN DANCING BEARS. **(SERIES OF SLIDES OF DANCING BEARS)**
  - IN JUNE OF 2013, A PHOTOGRAPHER IN FINLAND MANAGED TO CAPTURE PICTURES OF A BEAR COMING INTO A CLEARING WITH A FEW SMALL CUBS. HE WRITES THAT "THE CUBS BEHAVED LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN. THEY WERE PLAYING AND EVEN STARTED A FEW FRIENDLY FIGHTS. I FELT LIKE I WAS ON A PLAYGROUND IN FRONT OF MY HOUSE WHERE SMALL CHILDREN FROLIC. AT ONE POINT, THE THREE OF THEM GOT UP ON THEIR HIND LEGS AND STARTED PUSHING EACH OTHER. IT WAS LIKE THEY WERE DANCING IN A CIRCLE.
- FATHER RICHARD ROHR WRITES ABOUT HIS BELOVED LAB, VENUS **(SLIDE OF ROHR AND HIS DOG)**: "I LEARNED THAT I WOULD HAVE TO PUT DOWN MY FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD BLACK LAB BECAUSE SHE WAS SUFFERING FROM AN INOPERABLE CANCER. AFTER HER DIAGNOSIS, EVERY TIME I LOOKED AT HER, SHE GAZED UP AT ME WITH THOSE SAME SOFT AND PERMISSIVE EYES, AS IF TO SAY, "IT IS OKAY, YOU CAN LET ME GO. I KNOW IT IS MY TIME." BUT SHE PATIENTLY WAITED UNTIL I TOO WAS READY.
- AND SO FATHER ROHR DEDICATED HIS MOST RECENT BOOK, **THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST** TO VENUS. HIS DEDICATION READS: "I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO MY BELOVED FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD BLACK LAB, VENUS, WHOM I HAD TO RELEASE TO GOD WHILE BEGINNING TO WRITE THIS BOOK.

WITHOUT ANY APOLOGY, LIGHTWEIGHT THEOLOGY OR FEAR OF HERESY, I CAN APPROPRIATELY SAY THAT VENUS WAS ALSO CHRIST FOR ME.”

- THERE IT IS. THE DAMNING ASPECT OF ANXIETY IS THAT IT SHRINKS OUR WORLD DOWN TO ALMOST NOTHING. OUR VISION, RATHER THAN BEING OF THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST TRANSFIGURED ON THE MOUNTAIN—WHO IS EVERYTHING AND IN EVERYTHING—BECOMES OUR SMALL LITTLE FEARFUL WORLD. WE MISS THE TRANSFIGURED CHRIST SHINING IN ALL OF CREATION, INCLUDING DANCING BEARS AND OUR BELOVED PETS.
- WHEN WE REMAIN GROUNDED IN THE VISION OF CHRIST AS EVERYTHING AND IN EVERYTHING, OUR VISION EXPANDS INTO THE WHOLE WORLD. WE ARE SURROUNDED BY THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN ALL THINGS. THE GRACE OF GOD REVEALED IN CHRIST IS THE DIVINE GLUE THAT HOLDS EVERYTHING TOGETHER. **(SLIDE)**
- HOLD ONTO THIS VISION. CLUTCH THIS VISION TO YOUR HEART. RISE EVERY MORNING DETERMINED TO BE CAPTURED BY THIS VISION. SEE CHRIST EVERYWHERE. SEE CHRIST IN EVERYTHING....
- THE SECOND ASPECT OF THE VISION IS THIS: **THERE IS NO ME WITHOUT THEE.** WE CONTRIBUTE EITHER TO FAITH OR FEAR FOR ONE ANOTHER.
- WITHOUT BEING A MARTYR, I CAN SAY THAT IN THESE LAST YEARS OF MY MINISTRY, I HAVE GIVEN MY ALL FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CLC.
- I DON'T KNOW THAT I COULD EVEN TELL YOU WHY, EXCEPT THE VISION OF CHRIST IN THIS PLACE HAS ALLOWED ME TO REMAIN THROUGH SOME OF THE TOUGHEST YEARS OF MY ORDAINED MINISTRY.
- I BELIEVE IN YOU. I BELIEVE IN WHAT IS POSSIBLE IN THIS COMMUNITY BECAUSE OF YOU.
- AS HURTFUL AS IT WAS TO SOME, IT WAS NECESSARY TO DRIVE OUT THE NEGATIVITY, THE BACKBITING, THE CONSTANT CRITICISM, THE MISTRUST, THE JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT, THE INWARD FOCUS ON CONTROLLING WHAT HAPPENED WITHIN THESE WALLS.

- WHY?
- BECAUSE WITHOUT BEING GRANDIOSE, I BELIEVE THAT COMING TO WORSHIP IS MEANT TO BE A MINI-MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE. THAT WORSHIP OUGHT TO BE UPLIFTING—A WORD THAT REMINDS ME OF THE MOUNTAINTOP.: BEING LIFTED UP.
  - TO BE HONEST, IN THAT FIRST YEAR, I CAN REMEMBER BEING OVERWHELMED BY A DEPRESSING SPIRIT WHILE I WAS PREACHING ONE SUNDAY TO TWENTY PEOPLE AT THE 8:00 WORSHIP SERVICE. IT WAS SO BAD I FELT THIS STRONG DESIRE TO JUST STOP AND WALK OUT.
- WORSHIP IS MEANT TO RAISE OUR SPIRITS. I HOPE, IN SOME SMALL WAY, MY PREACHING TOUCHES YOUR HEART, THAT IT GROUNDS YOU IN CHRIST. EVEN AS MY HEART SWELLS AS ED MAKES THAT ORGAN SING. CHRIST COMES TO US JOYFULLY IN THE BREAD AND WINE.
- WE CONTRIBUTE TO WHETHER WE ARE TOUCHED BY FAITH OR FEAR WHEN WE COME TOGETHER AS CLC.
- WE ARE CALLED TO BANISH THE ANXIETY WITHIN THESE WALLS, SO WE CAN BE BLESSED AND STRENGTHENED SO WE CAN TURN OUTWARD AND BE A BLESSING FOR THE COMMUNITY OF MILLVALE.
- PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY. PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH ADDICTION. CHILDREN LIVE IN POVERTY. PEOPLE LIVE WITH ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION. THERE IS TOO LITTLE OF EVERYTHING HERE EXCEPT PERHAPS PEOPLE OF GOODWILL WORKING ON BEHALF OF OTHERS.
- AND WE CAN BE A COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE A VISION OF CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY WHEREVER WE DISCERN THE VOICE OF CHRIST CALLING TO US.

- AND THAT IS WHY I NEED YOU TO INVITE PEOPLE TO JOIN US IN COMMUNITY. WE NEED A STRONG AND GROWING COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS WHO SEE CHRIST EVERYWHERE.
  
- WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF MAKING A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY. DOING SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY. I FEEL IT COMING. I KNOW IT IN MY HEART. I CAN SEE IT OUT THERE.
  
- AND HERE'S WHAT WE NEED FROM ALL OF YOU:
  - WE NEED TO BREAK THE 20-80 RULE, WHERE 20% OF A CONGREGATION DOES 80% OF EVERYTHING.
  - CLC NEEDS YOU TO GET INVOLVED IN A MINISTRY TEAM.
  - CLC NEEDS YOU TO PRAY FOR OUR CONGREGATION EVERY DAY.
  - CLC NEEDS YOU TO COME TO FAITH AND FAMILY CAFÉ TO DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES FACING US.
  - CLC NEEDS AS MANY AS POSSIBLE OF YOU TO BE INVOLVED THIS LENT IN ONE OF OUR COURSES: WOMEN WHO STRENGTHEN THEIR SPIRITS WITH PAT BAUER, PEOPLE WHO DEEPEN THEIR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE WITH JOHN CURRY, PEOPLE WHO DEEPEN THEIR PRAYER LIFE THROUGH CENTERING PRAYER.
  - CLC NEEDS YOU TO DO A BETTER JOB OF FINANCIALLY SUPPORTING OUR BUDGET AND CAPITAL CAMPAIGN. IF YOU HAVE NOT INCREASED YOUR GIVING THIS YEAR, WE NEED YOU TO DO SO. IF YOU HAVE NOT CONTRIBUTED TO THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN, WE NEED YOU TO DO SO.
  - CLC NEEDS YOU TO COMMIT TO HOLDING ONE ANOTHER IN YOUR HEARTS SO WE BANISH FEAR AND REPLACE IT WITH FAITH.
  
- WE LIVE IN AN ANXIOUS NATION AND THAT ANXIETY AFFECTS US ALL. WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER.
  
- BUT WE CAN ALSO RECOGNIZE BEING IN CHRIST TOGETHER, SHARING THE VISION OF THE TRANSFIGURED CHRIST, CONNECTING TO ONE ANOTHER DEEPLY IN FAITH, AND FINDING THE JOY OF HELPING OTHERS.

- WITHOUT A VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH. WITH A TWOFOLD VISION, WE COME ALIVE. (**SLIDE OF TRANSFIGURED CHRIST**)
- SERMON SONG: **WATER WHEN THE WELL IS DRY** BY BUDDY MILLER