

February 14, 2021 ~ last Sunday after the Epiphany ~ Glory to glory!

O Lord uphold me that I may uplift you and may the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

What are you looking forward to when the pandemic ends? I am looking forward to travelling again, to holding heads with family and friends at a large dinner table and saying grace together and doing a squeeze prayer of connectedness. I am looking forward to my weekly children's talk on the steps inside the church. I can't wait to baptize our newest grandson Oliver.

We are blessed as we know that there will be an end to the pandemic. Within the next year, we will all be vaccinated and we will begin anew. Hold onto that hope. It would have been so different during wartime as no one knows how and when a war will end.

I am looking forward to the introduction of a new airline, Flair, coming to Thunder Bay. I read in the paper this week that one-way flights to Toronto will be as low as \$40!! Travel time, here I come but not yet!!

We all need things to look forward to ~ trips, births, visits, friends and family, a new home, a new job, a new school, retirement, graduations, so many things!

As Christians, we always look forward. In the words of Jesus, we can't plow looking backwards. When we are heading into reflection seasons in the church such as Advent and Lent, the service before these seasons begin is marked by the glory of Christ and looking forward. On the last Sunday before the 4-week season for Advent begins, we celebrate the Reign of Christ and we wait with anticipation for Christ's incarnation and glory at the end of time. On the last Sunday before the 7-week season of Lent, we end the season of Epiphany with the Transfiguration. We also have the Feast of the Transfiguration on August 6, 2021.

Today, we celebrate how Jesus was transfigured in front of 3 of his disciples, Peter, James, and John at the top of a mountain. The story of the transfiguration began when Jesus brought them up alone with him on a high mountain. Mountains are a common place to seek divine revelation. Remember how Moses spoke with God on a high mountain, Mt. Sinai. The prophet Elijah experienced God on a high mountain, Mt. Horeb. In our Old Testament passage for this

morning from the 2nd Book of Kings, Elisha is blessed to see his mentor Elijah ascending to heaven in a chariot of fire. Jesus enjoyed praying on hilltops and teaching on hilltops. Think about the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Jesus would slip away for private prayer on hilltops, sometimes all night. After the feeding of the 5000, Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. (Matthew 14:22)

We are not told the name of the mountain where Jesus was transfigured, but rather that it was a “high mountain” (Mark 9:2). Theologians have debated for centuries between 2 mountains, Mt. Tabor or Mt. Hermon, for the location of the transfiguration.

This significant event in the ministry of Jesus took place not after the crucifixion or the resurrection or the ascension. It took place during his 3 years of ministry, before Jesus went to Jerusalem, before his trial, and before his suffering and dying for us.

Here is what happened: Jesus “was transfigured before them and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.” Mark 9:2-3

I love the word TRANSFIGURED. It means Jesus was transformed into something beautiful and lifted up. In fact, the glory of his divinity shone through him. That is why the transfiguration is important. It supports Christ’s divinity. God speaks to Peter, James, and John and says the same words that God spoke at Jesus’ Baptism.

“This is my Son, the Beloved!” Mark 9:7

The transfiguration was a marker, a sign of hope, a sign of glory that reminds us of the true nature of Christ and points us towards Easter. We need strengthening. We need moments of grace to look forward to. We need to be changed into Christ’s likeness and share in his glory.

In just 3 days, we will be entering Lent through Ash Wednesday. We will use the 7 weeks of Lent, to draw closer to God, and to ask for mercy and forgiveness. Life is uncertain and fleeting and we must, as disciples of Jesus, use these 40 days to ask to be cleansed so we too may be transfigured and show God’s glory to the world.

I encourage you to drive by the outside of the church on Ash Wednesday, February 17 between noon and 1 pm. No matter how cold it is, I and two of our Lay Readers, Alison and Marty, will be there standing on the road. I will bless you and they will give you a small container of ashes. You will take them home and during our 7 pm Live Stream on Ash Wednesday, *you will make an ash cross on your forehead, and say with me the words:*

Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.

We don't practice Lenten devotions because we have nothing else to do. We practice them because we know that it is through the power of God that we are reminded that life is a precious gift and that through faith in Jesus, we are given eternal life.

That is the signpost that we keep our eyes focused upon. When you add a spiritual practice to your Lenten disciples, whether you add an increase in prayer or a change in your tithing habits, or you fast from favourite foods, whenever it gets hard, think about why you are doing this. Think about our Saviour transfigured on the mountain and how heaven came down to earth on that day.

Today is also Valentine's Day. A day when we celebrate LOVE. We remember the Bible's definition of God which is:

GOD IS LOVE (from 1 John 4:8)

We share in God's glory and grow in God's likeness and become transfigured ourselves when we love, "not in word or speech, but in truth and action." (1 John 3:18)

Jouni and I are blessed with wonderful neighbours. Yesterday our neighbour Shirley dropped by with a loaf of fresh raisin bread from a bakery including a hand written card from Shirley and her husband Greg wishing us a Happy Valentine's Day. These neighbours love in "truth and action."

I chaired the annual vestry meeting for St. John's in Schreiber yesterday and they have been without a rector for 7 years and yet they carry on together as a community of faith, united in truth and in action. They worship together, they support each other, they reach out into the community with their thrift shop, they love "in truth and action."

May we enter into Lent in a spirit of love and hope. May we always love in truth and action. May we focus on the glory of Christ and may we be strengthened to suffer with him and be changed into his likeness, From mountaintop to mountaintop. From transfiguration to transfiguration.

From glory to glory.