

22 February – Transfiguration

I speak to you in the name of He who Is, who Was and who is Yet to come. Amen. PBS

Today's sermon will focus on the first lesson and the Gospel. This sermon will also be deeply personal. Please buckle up.

The section of scripture we're given today is not large. The reading from Exodus is six verses. The Gospel is only eight verses. And yet they tell us a great deal.

In the first lesson God calls to Moses and tells him to come up the mountain. God is going to give Moses the commandments written on tablets of stone. The law and the commandments that God wrote for "them". Moses goes up with Joshua and they are enveloped in a cloud for six days. On the seventh day they are called out.

In the Gospel message today, it begins "six days later " Jesus takes Peter, James and John up on a mountain to pray. Nothing spectacularly different here. Jesus would often go off to pray. This time he brought three of his students to watch and learn.

Up the mountain they go. Jesus is transfigured...his clothes become dazzling white. His face is described as being like the sun. This would be a tad shocking to see. One minute he's the olive-skinned rabbi they've known for a couple of years and the next thing, he's positively glowing!

THEN two of the Hebrew Scriptures' best known and loved prophets appear out of thin air. Moses and Elijah. Now THERE'S something you don't see every day...

Peter, in his excitement offers to build three dwellings. One for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus.

I would imagine for Peter, this was his best day ever. He didn't want it to end. Let's just stay here on the mountain where everything is amazing. Yet it wasn't to be. Before Peter even stops speaking there is a thick cloud which descends on them and the voice of God booms from above "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Holy GOD! So of course, the three fall down in fear. Jesus says "Stand up, shake it off, you're fine. Don't worry about it. That was just Dad. Y'okay there?" He then leads them down off the mountain with a stern warning not to tell anyone. And they don't. Peter writes of it in his letter, many years after the death of Jesus, of those things which happened.

You'll remember the words "this is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased". They were spoken at Jesus baptism. This time a phrase is added "Listen to him". It gives him a bit of street cred, it's God reinforcing that Jesus is God's son and servant on earth. What he (Jesus) says can be trusted.

One of the most frightening things while I was awaiting surgery was how I would be while I recovered. I don't like to sit still. You'll notice I'm rarely completely still, if I'm sitting I'm tapping my leg, swinging my foot or using my finger to trace an imaginary

pattern. Stillness is foreign to me.

For the first week I couldn't move very much between fatigue, pain, dizziness, nausea and extreme thirst. I drank a full bottle of water every two hours for 5 days. Which means I slept and I used the bathroom. A lot.

Eventually the pain abated and I was able to stay awake for longer periods of time. I decided one day to go for a walk and after half a block I slipped and fell. It was a gentle fall, when I realised I was going to fall I managed to use gravity to my advantage. I slipped backwards and landed on my back, did not bang my head. All in all, it was likely the most graceful I have ever fallen. When I regained my bearings and looked around I noticed a family of four deer laying on the front lawn. I was there entertainment and it may have been my imagination, but I swear they were chewing in unison, watching this silly biped navigate ice unsuccessfully.

I had to roll onto the snow covered lawn and was eventually able to right myself. That was the farthest thing from gentle and graceful one has ever seen. Yet I did it and I walked back into the house where I was staying. I felt annoyed, discouraged and scared. It was nearly a week before I ventured out on my own.

When I came to from the anaesthetic I heard "Take a breath Andrea, a deep breath." It seems I had forgotten how to draw air all the way into my lungs. I had to concentrate to breathe deeply enough to stop the apnea alarm. Eventually I was able to move around a bit better.

Honestly, I missed all of you yet didn't think about work. I knew everything was in good hands and I needed to concentrate on getting better.

When I was recovering, I spent four weeks in Cranbrook that moved slowly. It was four weeks on the mountain, as it were. I tested my body, my mind and my soul. I emptied myself and took a good hard look at just who I am. Outside of my vocation. Outside of my body. Outside of the labels that I wear. Who am I? I am a child of God.

This was the most significant surgery I've ever had and this will be the longest recovery time I've ever experienced. Recovery will take a long time. I've been told it will be a year before I can drive distances of any significant length. I'm not to drive more than two hours without a substantial break. Which is not my style...but I will learn it.

My entire perspective has changed. I have been Transfigured.

Not literally as Jesus was... Elijah was...as Moses was...

I know that I cannot go back to living how I did before.

It wasn't healthy in any way.

I am determined to work smarter, not harder.

I will delegate wherever I can, if it is appropriate to do so.

I will listen to the needs of my body, and when I miss the cues I will listen harder.

I couldn't stay in Cranbrook forever.

I needed to come down from the mountain and back home to Fernie.

I realised when I got home how much I have changed.

By slowing down I am now more aware of what is around me. I am finding joy in the smallest things in life. Putting my phone down and raising my eyes. Looking around. I was at Mugshots the other day waiting to meet a friend and intentionally arrived about 15 minutes early. I noticed that every person in there was staring at a screen. There was a group sitting on the couches who were attempting to chat AND watch their screens. Fascinating. My friend arrived and we had a lovely visit, both of us with our phones face down on the table.

There was a report published a month ago in the Anglican Journal which predicted by 2040 there will no longer be Churches as we now understand them. There will be Christians, there will be followers of Jesus, but the buildings themselves will be standing empty. Why?

Well, many reasons. If we look around our congregation, how many people do we see without white or grey hair? If you look around the congregation, count the number of empty spaces where people used to sit. Most have died. Some have moved. Churches, regardless of denomination, are seeing a fall in attendance. What are we to do?

We are called, as Church, to listen. We need to stop putting doctrine, ecclesiastical laws, rules above relationships.

I've realised that the Church will change...because she has to. She has changed since she was founded, two thousand years ago. The question then becomes how will she be Transfigured in her change? How will we?

How do we, as followers of Jesus, draw others to the light of Christ?

Not by giving out tracts or demanding people change their ways.

We do it, the way Jesus did it. By being present. To listen. To feed. To help. To listen without judging. To be fully present.

We, all of us, need to learn how to simply BE, rather than always putting the work first.

I encourage you to slow down, look around. Look at the sky, the mountains, the sun. Drink in the sound of children playing, dogs barking, Church bells ringing. Look people in the eye. Live your life as a child of God. Live your life as a follower of Jesus.

Focus on relationship, not rules. Rules are important, remember to wear your seatbelt and don't speed. Wear clean underwear and carry a clean handkerchief when you leave the house. I don't mean ignore those rules, rather, the societal rules which tell us that because we know God we are superior to those who do not.

God doesn't want us to bring people kicking and screaming, or with the promise of a free meal, into relationship. God wants us to give of everything we are. Draw others to our light as a beacon in the darkness. To show there is another way to be in the world, away from the hyper-caffeinated, consumer-dominated mentality that tells us more is more, greed is good, and the one with the most toys wins.

Push all that away and remember Jesus on the mountainside with Peter and James.

It was, for all intents and purposes, the best day Peter had ever seen. And so he didn't want it to end. Absolutely understandable. The thing is, you can't stay there.

Days do end. Children leave home. Parents die. We retire. Re-assess our finances. Make plans. Perhaps we travel. And eventually we, too, die.

So between now and then let us slow down, savour Creation, give thanks to the Creator. Because without that, we are simply atoms, flesh, muscle, sinew and bone. We are dust and to dust we will return. We'll hear that statement again on Wednesday.

Mary Oliver, the late American poet gives the following instructions for "Living a Life".

1. Pay Attention
2. Be Astounded
3. Tell About It

These instructions are similar to what Peter, James and John experienced. They went up a mountain. They saw Moses and Elijah. They heard the voice of God. They were astounded. And eventually, they told about it. They came down from that mountain much different then they went up. We are called to do the same.

The good thing is, we don't actually have to ascend a mountain. Although its okay if you want to...we're surrounded by mountains.

We are called to listen to Jesus. And Jesus tells us to be in relationship with everyone around us. We are not to turn anyone away from the love of God because everyone is a child of God. Just like you are. Just like I am.

So, Church, as we move forward, may we remember that we are God's children. As we move towards Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, may we experience a Spiritual Awakening.

Lent is my favourite season in the Church. A time when we are called to do the dark and difficult work which will lead us to Spiritual Awakening.

I encourage you all to join in this difficult yet incredibly important work. Let us all join in doing this together.

Let all God's people say Amen!

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan
Pastor, Priest and Prophet
Christ Church Anglican and Knox United Church

23 February 2020 – Transfiguration
Exodus 24.12-18
Matthew 17.1-9