

SERMON: "A MEETING OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE"
TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT EXODUS 24:12-18
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 17:1-9

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Transfiguration of the Lord

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INTRODUCTION

With the exception of the middle seat on the airplane,
I think the middle is a good place to be. I've spent a lifetime
personally, professionally and politically encouraging others to find space
together in the middle. Work things out. Find common ground.

Politically ... I think 'bipartisan' is a good word, a good thing.
Personally and professionally, the middle isn't always comfortable
(like seat 17B on the plane) but it is where good things tend to happen
Good things happen in the middle, in between

Let me stick with the airplane thing for an illustration.
Fly you back to my hometown, Atlanta, home to the world's busiest airport.
Had more than a few couples in my church there where one stayed home,
either at home or with a job in metro Atlanta. The other spouse traveled,
put that airport to good use, gone most of the week. Home for the weekend.

These couples often had what might be called 'food fights.'
The one at home wanted to get out of the house, go out to eat on the weekend
The other, tired of eating on the road, wanted a home cooked meal
The pastor often got called in to referee these food fights
I encouraged them to meet, guess where, in the middle – both/and

Sometimes the middle works like that ... a place to compromise and cooperate.
Sometimes the middle is an actual place. That place in South Carolina
Gaffney. Cheaper gas and about halfway between home and Grandma's.
Sometimes the middle is more space in time than a place on a map.
"Are we almost there?" we'd say as kids from the back seat.
"About halfway" we've answered as adults from the front

Today we are about halfway in both ways. We're in the middle
The middle of the journey between Christmas and Easter
The middle of the biblical stories of Jesus' life, his journey with the disciples
He's been teaching and healing in Galilee. Now he begins his journey
to Jerusalem, to his destiny, to the cross

Today we stop midway along that journey, the story of Jesus' transfiguration
The mountain where it is believed this happened is on the way
It sits in the middle of the valley route from Galilee to Jerusalem,
This midway mountaintop experience happens in the heartland of the Holy Land.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

This morning I want to focus on this stop along the journey, this mountaintop,
as being a place in the middle in terms of time – space in time
This is a meeting of past, present and future

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

The disciples there that day knew they were on their way to Jerusalem
They were very much thinking ahead to whatever the future would hold
They were, also, very much caught up in the moment on that mountain.
Who wouldn't be? Jesus was glowing right in front of them

Also right in front of them ... the heroes of their faith, Moses and Elijah
Moses - The one who led the people out of slavery, who gave them the law
Elijah - The great prophet, the one who spoke up against evil kings
What an experience that must have been!

They were connected to the past with the prophets Moses and Elijah,
To the present with Jesus ... and with God's voice from heaven
And to the future with wherever Jesus would lead them
when they came down the mountain and continued their journey

I rather like how they respond, on point and with an understatement
“It is good for us to be here.” There's the understatement
And then the idea ... “If you wish, we will set up three tents here”
Translated ... “How about we put up a small sign, a memorial
like one of those historical markers.” I like those markers.

I like knowing our history, connecting it to the present and to the future.
I am certainly not afraid of history. Like Churchill said,
“Those that fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it.”

That's true in a negative sense ... and a positive one as well.
Connecting to history helps us in the present and future.
That's what preachers try to do every weekend with the good book.
Make that connection in time – between then and there, here and now

GOOD TO BE HERE

This is a story once upon a time about time, all those times in the middle
The story as told is addressed to three audiences – one is those there
on that mountaintop in between Galilee and Jerusalem, another is
the audience Matthew was addressing as he wrote the gospel
some eighty or so years later, the early church in their context

The third audience is all those, like us, who would later read this account
That is a whole lot of 'in the middles' for the first disciples there and then,
the disciples of the early Church back then and disciples ever since
including disciples here and now in this 'place for everyone,'
a place in the middle

Each one of those audiences, in their own ways, resemble the Kivett boys
Kind of whining from the back seat, "are we there yet?" or "how much longer?"
Looking forward to getting there, wherever 'there' was on that trip
and looking forward to, needing to stop, somewhere along the way

Don't we need those places in the middle ... and not just because
we had too much coffee (or Dr. Pepper)? We need places in between,
on the way, in the middle ... middle as loosely defined as by those parents
(like mine, like me) who answered 'we're about halfway.'

The disciples needed that trip up the mountain.
They realized it later no doubt as they reflected on their journey with Jesus
They realized it in the moment saying "it is good for us to be here."

It is good for us to be here today, to be here together
In this place and in this story.

Transfiguration Sunday, I know, is not that big a deal
Anybody get a Happy Transfiguration card or basket of candy today?
Anybody planning a big Transfiguration feast?
No, these stops along the way aren't big for feasts, maybe some candy
maybe some gas station chicken or if you're lucky some barbecue

What these moments in time are though ... is timely.
We need these stops ... rest stops, pit stops and historical markers
We need mountaintops where we catch a glimpse of Jesus in all his glory
where we hear the voice of God a little more clearly
where we connect to the heroes of the past and hope for the future

This "place for everyone" may not have the lights and sound of that mountaintop
but isn't that one of the reasons, the deepest reason, we come to church?
We need those moment along the way – those side trips, those stops
Like a stop in Gaffney, South Carolina, we need to refresh and refuel
We need time on the way, in the middle ... with Jesus

SUMMARY

Those moments in time, wherever and whenever they are ...

Those connections of past, present and future ...

The common thread in all those is Jesus!

The Transfiguration was and is for all audiences a reminder

A reminder of who he is and where he is (with us)

I need those reminders. I need Jesus.

I really like how one writer reminded me that this vision of Jesus

where he shines bright as the sun, could well be understood by the original

audience that Matthew was writing, the early church ... and by us

as a vision of the resurrected Jesus, victorious over death Jesus

I hadn't thought that before (and I've preached on this a dozen plus times)

But I'll think about that way from now on ... a glimpse of Christ in all his glory

Thinking that way, seeing Jesus like that, let me share one more thought with you
trying to connect past, present and future somewhere in the middle ...

That middle ... it covers a lot of ground and time in between

It's not just that place with cheap gas about halfway to Granny's

It's not just the median, mode or mid-point on the map

That middle where Jesus reminds us of who he is? It's all over the place

It's all over time, back in the day, yesterday, today, tomorrow. Jesus is well traveled.

Let me then circle around and try another airport example

You know where and when I've often seen Jesus? The Atlanta airport

I've been there many times either traveling myself or picking up a friend

At the world's busiest airport, travelers are shepherded below ground to trains
that connect all the concourses, all those arriving and departing flights.

The trains take you to the terminal, the last stop. Everyone gets off there

and heads up three large escalators or one of the elevators. Everyone.

The top of the escalator is where everyone else waits for those travelers.

That is where I have often seen Jesus shining bright, usually in one of three ways,

There are no doubt more ways (who am I to try and fit Jesus into an outline)

But these three scenes are the ones I've often seen re-enacted.

There's the woman dressed a little nicer than most.

She sees the one she loves. They embrace and kiss.

She kicks up her foot as they kiss like something in an old movie.

There are small children running or toddling into the arms of grandparents.

There are people who respectfully applaud when men and women in uniform
come up those escalators to thank them for their sacrifice and service

I see Jesus when I see these things. I see him at the airport.

I see Jesus in the middle.