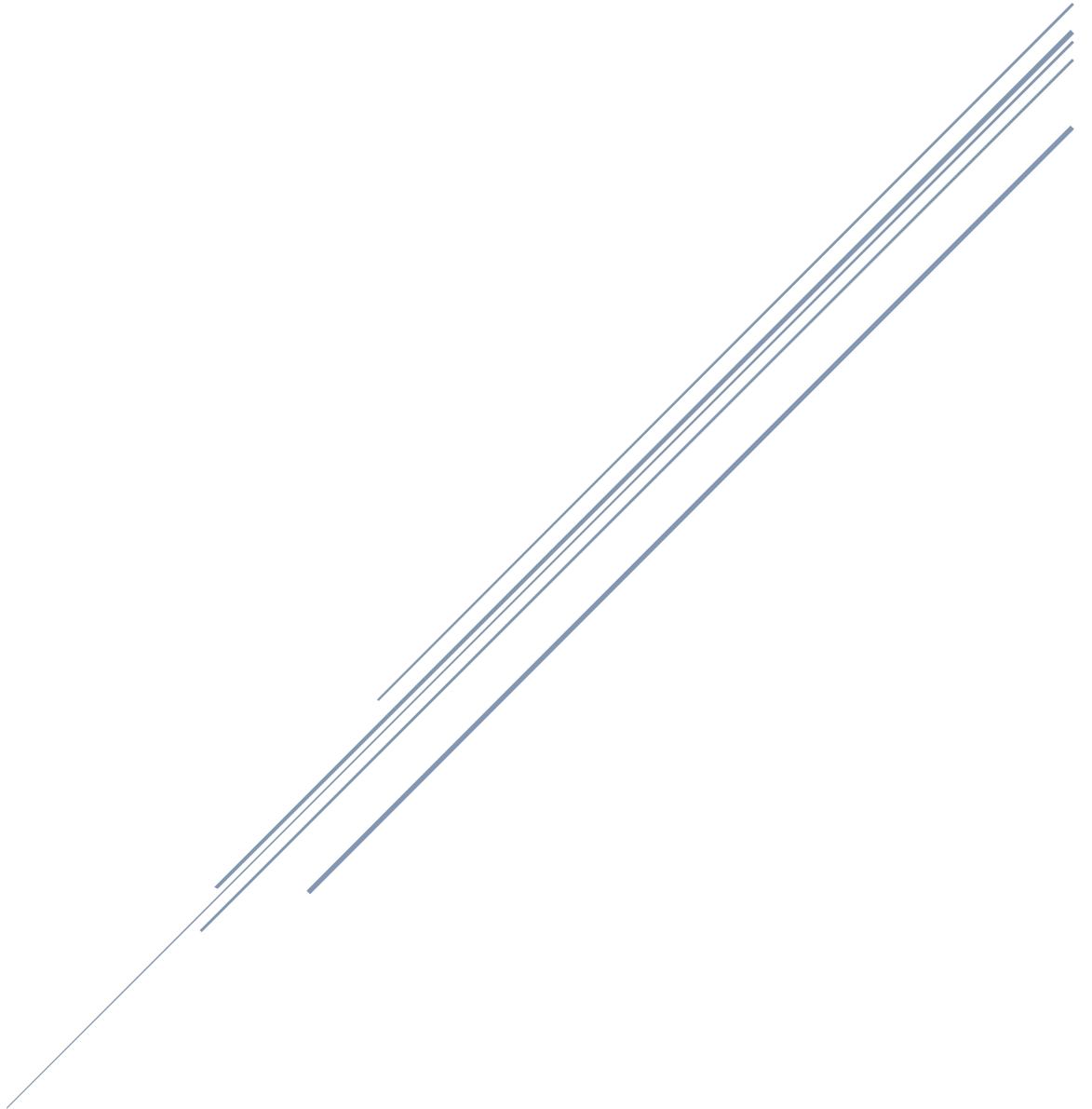


“...BUT YOU CAN'T STAY HERE!

Matthew 17:1-9



March 1/2014

March 2

This week’s Gospel lesson is almost always called the Transfiguration of Jesus. The Greek word that is translated as ‘transfiguration’ is the same word from which we get our word metamorphosis – *metamorphoo*. And I submit to you this morning that Jesus wasn’t the only one transformed that day on the mountain. I think that we could call this story the transformation of Jesus, Peter, and probably James and John as well!

Would-be pastors and ministers – all my friends and classmates at Iliff – we all have had to talk about our calling *ad nauseum*! And of course it’s important for a candidate to ministry to be able to verbalize his or her call to ministry. I’m not sure if regular people who aren’t called to ministry, and are forced to intentionally examine their call, ever think very much about it...

My call came in answer to a prayer that went something like this: “OK, God – I’m sober. I’ve been sober for a year, God -- NOW WHAT?” At that time I had something I had never had before. At the age of 42 I had a 9 – 5 job with benefits and a 401K. No more living week to week on cash under the table, or bartering for beer or gas. No more working weekends and holidays. No more working nights for tips as a bartender or waiter. I felt like a real person – I had a real job.

So I was surfing the internet, seeking my fortune if you will, and I came across a local Christian college recently accredited as a university, Palm Beach Atlantic University – home of the mighty sailfish. Usually these adult ed programs are mostly business courses or nursing. PBA also has a good pharmacy school, I’m told. But one thing PBA had that I hadn’t seen before and immediately grabbed my attention was a Bachelor’s degree in – guess what -- Ministry.

Immediately I knew my call. The light went on and I knew that God wanted me to do something – to use my experience strength and hope to change the world and the church – to be a guide or a shepherd of sorts to show people that there’s more than one way to experience God and the Scriptures.

Now my call was certainly no mountain top experience. Sitting in front of a computer screen at my desk – the reception desk at a large insurance agency --

nobody glowed with a dazzling light – quite the opposite in fact – if you can imagine a bunch of insurance agents all in their cubicles – irate customers yelling on the other end of the phone. Not much dazzle there!

And later I recalled that God didn’t wait until I was sober and had my act together to make this call. God seldom if ever waits for us to be ready – it’d be a long wait!

When I was getting ready to graduate from HS I had my options narrowed down to two choices – music school, or Mom said I’d make a good minister, which I did consider – for about 2 seconds! Naturally I picked music! It sounded more fun – and easier! It’s all about me, after all, right? I never even thought about becoming a minister after that...

I bring this up because we always look at this story as the transfiguration of Jesus, as well we should, with the blazing face and the dazzling white clothes and all... But Peter, I think, has a life-changing, ‘mountain top’ experience that day. I think Peter’s call came earlier like mine; but on the mountain that day with James and John and Jesus Peter gets transformed as well; at least, the beginning of Peter’s transformation may have started up on that mountain. It’s easy to miss because the story moves from funny to poignant pretty quickly.

Funny? There’s something funny about this? Look at poor Peter falling all over himself to do something the way Peter does – speak first and ask questions later, he’s always very spontaneous. Peter wants to stay in the moment. He wants to build tents or booths for them so they can hang out for a while, maybe have a chat and a snack, I guess.

Remember that Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience. That’s why the presence of Moses and Elijah is so important. Moses represents the Law & Elijah represents the Prophets. The Law and the Prophets make up the the Old Testament as we call it, or the Hebrew Bible. Presumably, Peter’s desire to build these temporary dwellings is an allusion to Sukkot – the feast of tabernacles that commemorates the wandering in the desert, and the temporary shelters and tabernacles they built. It demonstrates Peter’s desire for Jesus to establish His Messianic Kingdom. Peter, apparently, wants to stay and Jesus says “No, get up,

we have to go back down the mountain and go to work. You can't just hang out in the euphoria of the vision. Get your hands dirty...

Then the voice from heaven literally interrupts Peter while he's fumbling around – "Shut up already – this is my Son -- listen to Him!"

But of course it's not funny for long. In fact, it's probably pretty terrifying, and I can see Peter falling to the ground, covering his ears and squeezing his eyes shut. And then it's over -- the voice, the light, the Bible heroes – it's all gone except Jesus, reaching out, touching him, and saying, "Dude -- Peter, get up. Don't be afraid."

I think it's only natural to think Peter's "call" happened six days earlier, when Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah and Jesus called him "the rock." It's like my mom saying to me, "You'd make such a good pastor..." The call came but I didn't hear it – or I chose not to. And later –much later – I actually heard God's call while I was sitting at my desk in the Wells Fargo Insurance services office. I think God calls us over and over until we acknowledge it. Most pastors will tell you they either ignored it or even resisted their call for years...

So I wonder.... I wonder if Peter's real sense of call didn't happen here, when the voice interrupts all his plots and plans and announces that this Jesus is none other than God's beloved Son and so the most important thing Peter can do is simply listen to him. In that moment... everything for Peter was clear ... it all made sense. If they'd been invented back then I think the light bulb would have gone on for Peter that day.

But of course it didn't last. Peter needs to be helped up off the ground, maybe wondering if anything had actually happened at all or whether he had just imagined it. And then on the way down the mountain Jesus talks again about his impending death and destiny. Peter and the others will continue to struggle to listen, to follow, and to be faithful. And actually, they don't know it yet, but we know Peter will fail. And Jesus will reach out to him again, help him up, and send him out. I have a feeling that every time Peter fell down and got help to get up, he would hear those words repeating, "... listen to him!"

That's what I mean by saying that this is the moment when Peter's transfiguration begins -- when Peter fails, falls, and is lifted up again, he realizes that through it all, he is called to “listen to Jesus.” This pattern, I think, is very common to those of us who call ourselves Christians. Of course we try our best, and sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail and fall short. We have moments of insight and moments of outright ignorance. We fall down in fear and we’re raised up again to go get back on the horse with confidence – perhaps to fall off again, but we are called to listen to Jesus; called to discern God's will – God’s way - to partner with God and to be transformed.

Now, for those of us who have been called to ministry this discernment is relatively easy – not easy, that’s not the right word, but maybe commonplace. We have to talk about it all the time, it seems! Whatever our doubts and insecurities, at least we have this duty – preaching and pastoring -- that we all recognize as “our call” from God. But what if you’re not a candidate for ministry going to seminary? What about you moms and dads, you employees and employers, students and retirees, the gainfully employed and those still looking for work, doctors and janitors, soldiers, taxi drivers, ranchers and accountants. You, me, we’re all called to something.

Can we – and when I say ‘we’ I mean ‘You’ – can we see ourselves in this story? Can we somehow identify with Peter? Do we believe that we, like Peter, have been called both to "listen to him" and to get back on the horse?

But I’m here to tell you that you are called, and that this story IS your story, and you have an important role in God's ongoing plan to save, and to bless, and to care for all the world.

And this is important - if God’s call for you is going to take hold, you have to hear it for yourself.

I think David Lose, author and professor at Luther Seminary hit the nail on the head: he writes, “...as a culture and even as the church, we tend to suppress the inclination that God has spoken to us, even if it's through the voice of another.”

So this week let me remind you that you are called – you are. I suggest you use the note-taking space in your bulletin as a journal to write down a time when you might have felt called, when you think you heard God's voice, and how you responded. Your experience may not be as dramatic as Peter's. Like me, you may have missed some of them completely... If you're feeling really bold, share what you wrote with somebody after worship today...

The UCC has adopted a slogan that I just love: “God is still speaking,” but God can call us ‘til God is blue in the face and if we aren’t listening, it’ll be just like me choosing music school because I thought it was easier. Also, more often than not, God uses the ordinary moments and people of our lives to call to us. We are called to listen to Jesus, and many of you already have -- and when we fall or fail, Jesus is there to reach out and pick us up again.

As I think about it, isn’t that what we’ve been talking about the last few weeks? How we are changed – or changing? Transformation – transfiguration if you will – is what all this is about? who we are, beloved children of God, how to be salt and light, and going the extra mile... “This is my son, the Beloved...Listen to Him.”

And all of it is pointing us toward transformation: of ourselves, of our church, and ultimately of our world. Amen.