

A Sermon Preached by Pastor Justin Johnson
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church Bellingham, WA
Transfiguration Sunday February 14, 2010
Text: Luke 9:28–43a

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You have seen it before. Most everyone can tell it. It is hard to hide. Their actions betray them, their face seems to glow. Yes, most of us can tell when another person is in love. Most of the time, when they are glowing, it is after they have had an encounter with their lover, whether it is meeting them for the first time or after spending a romantic evening with them. Perhaps you have heard these words uttered to you or you have said them to someone else, “You’ve met somebody.” Or you have had to remind a love-struck, distracted co-worker to focus on the job at hand. Yes, when someone is love-struck, we can tell. We know what is going on, everything else seems to fade to the background, but the one that they are in love with. There is a spark that is lit and the one in love seems to beam and glow.

And today, is the day that romantics across the land wait with eager longing for their Valentine while Hallmark rakes it in hand-over-fist as people pay them to identify and express their emotions. And tomorrow we will know, who was remembered by their valentine and who was not. Perhaps you do not celebrate Valentine’s Day, but acknowledge its other well known name, “Single’s Awareness Day.”

Ah yes, romantic love, that which is celebrated this day, causes hearts to stir and faces to glow, but is nothing like the love of God that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Romantic love is a feeling. God’s love for us is a choice. And it is the love of God for the world that compels Jesus from the mountain to plain and then to the cross as he accomplishes his exodus.

In our gospel reading, we have the story of the Transfiguration. A story that you probably know well because we hear it every year. It is a mountain top experience. One that leaves the disciples longing for the moment to last.

You know how it goes. Jesus takes with him Peter and John and James and they head up the mountain to pray. The disciples are tired, but they do not fall asleep and so they see what happens while Jesus is praying. They see two men, Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus about his exodus, which he

was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Just as the two men are leaving, Peter tries to capture the moment. “Lord, it is good for us to be here, let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

Who wouldn't try to capture this moment? Here you have two heroes of the Israel faith talking with the Son of God. Why not make it a sacred site that all people can come and visit and feel close to God? Well, Jesus' work is not finished. And the voice in the cloud that interrupts Peter as he is speaking without knowing what he is saying reminds them of such, declaring, “This is my son, my Chosen, listen to him!”

And what has Jesus been saying? Earlier in chapter nine in the story just before our reading for today, Jesus tells the disciples that the Son of Man must (dei, it is necessary) undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day raised up.” (Luke 9:22)

Yes, he has told them what is in store for him, the one that they have named as the Messiah of God (Luke 9:20). It was what Jesus was talking about with Moses and Elijah, as they spoke of his departure that he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. The NRSV translates the Greek to “departure” in our gospel reading. It is a poor translation. The Greek word is “Exodus”, which means more than just leaving, rather it has meanings of liberation, of being set free, like the Israelites were set free from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt's land. They are not talking of his ascension, but rather of his coming crucifixion.

And his coming crucifixion is what draws Jesus down the mountainside to the plain to Jerusalem, where he suffers and is put to death just like he predicted. In the cross, we know the depth of God's love for us and for the world.

For in the cross, the sin of the world is put upon the shoulders of Jesus and put to death. No longer does sin have the final word. Yes, it may wield its power as it drives people into despair through shame and guilt, but it does not have the final word, Jesus Christ does. And that word is forgiven. Yes, in the cross we know the depth of God's love for us, for God proves his love for us in while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

But just as Jesus said, his death was not the end, for on the third day, he was raised from the dead. And this is the promise that is for you and for me in Jesus Christ. That we too will be raised from the dead for death does not have the last word, but Jesus does and that word is for you and for me and for the world.

Yes, this exodus that Jesus accomplishes at Jerusalem, sets us free from all that binds and gives us hope to live into the future that God is calling us to.

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness. For where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And it is living in trust and hope in Jesus Christ that we live out our callings as God's children in this world. Living in the hope that is in Jesus Christ, knowing that our sins are forgiven, we need not tip-toe around this earth always in fear that God might strike us down for our failures, but we can act with boldness for the sake of our neighbor and for the world.

For God's love is not like romantic love. Romantic love is a feeling that can disappear as quickly as it comes. God's love is a deep, abiding love, that leads us through the valley of the shadow of death into life. In Jesus Christ, God chooses you and me, to be his beloved. To walk with us through all of life's ups and downs and twists and turns. Yes, the cross stands as a symbol of God's love for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.