

It is hard to believe, but we are already at Transfiguration Sunday. It seems like just last week we were wrapping up Christmas. But, the liturgical calendar is so different from how we think about the year. It would make sense that the year starts with the birth of Christ and ends with his resurrection. But it doesn't work that way. And trust me, that is a hard point to get across to confirmands.

In preparing for this week, I tried to think about how to approach the scripture lesson. There are so many different points happening in the reading. We have Jesus telling his disciples for the first time that he is going to die. He takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray and transforms in front of them. Peter has visions of Moses and Elijah. The voice of God resonates that Jesus is his Beloved Son. If John was there, why didn't he write about the transfiguration in his Gospel or any of his letters?

So, where do you start? Well, I did what I always do...I read. And I read 4 different transfiguration sermons. I watched 2 other sermons. I asked around about what they were looking for with this sermon. It is the precursor to lent, Ash Wednesday is nearly upon us. What should I say?

Generally, when I read the scripture I find inspiration somewhere in my research. This was not the case this week. Every sermon was unique in its own way, but they heavily reflected the ideology of the speaker. I realize how weird that sounds. What I mean by that is they were great for them, but not for me.

They spoke about giving something that we care about up for lent. We should feel the sacrifice from the loss of something we cherish. Another talked about adding a service to our lives. We can pray more each day or volunteer somewhere each week. That way we would feel closer to Jesus as he did so much for us. One even did a risk benefit analysis first looking at the impact Jesus' death had on his disciples and then examining it on modern individuals.

After much discernment, I have decided to share with you a story about a young lady that I know, Courtney. Courtney was one of my first hires when I was opening a restaurant on the Plaza in Kansas City. She came in to fill out an application and I did a quick interview with her and after 2 questions, I knew that she was going to be a great hire.

Courtney had just graduated from college and was looking for a part time job while she figured out what she was going to do with the rest of her life. She was incredibly polite, quiet, and shy. So, I put her right in front and made her interact with almost every guest that came through our doors.

After about 6 months of working with her, I was sitting in a meeting and I said that I wanted to promote her. I wasn't looking at putting her straight into management, but I wanted to make her a shift leader, give her some more responsibility. The room went quiet. Everyone loved Courtney, but they didn't trust that she had the correct skills, because she was so polite and quiet.

The discussion felt like it went on for hours. And at the end of it, the collective group told me that I should wait. And I said OK. The vice president of the company walked with me back to the office and asked me if I was really going to wait. I told him, "No." But, I was going to give her the option on whether she wanted to do it, before I told anyone that I was doing it.

At the end of the shift, I pulled her aside and asked her about being a shift leader. I laid out what it would entail, the raise, the responsibility, etc. And she turned me down. She was like everyone else, she didn't see in her what I saw in her.

We talked about why she didn't want to do it. She was concerned about failing. And I told her that we all are worried about failing. But, we don't know if we don't try. I asked her to think it over and in 3 weeks I would ask her again.

During the 3 weeks, I started showing her different parts of the job. I walked her through different positions and taught her how to be a trainer. We were closing one night and the time period was almost up, and she asked me why it was so important to me that she did this. And I told her that I had 2 reasons why it was so important to me.

The first reason was because I believed in her. I knew that she would be good at the position. There was no doubt in my mind that she would be great at it and that eventually she could do more. The second reason was that one day I wasn't going to be there any more and I wanted to make certain that everyone was taken care of. That included either her taking over my spot in some way or making certain that she had everything she needed to succeed when I was gone.

She unloaded on me. It had never occurred to her that I wasn't going to be at that store for as long as that store was open. Hearing it for the first time, she felt betrayed and was confused on why I would put that much effort into her when all I was going to do was leave.

I'm sure that same sense of confusion and betrayal is what the disciples felt when Jesus told them that he was going to die. There was no if, but when. He was dying for them so that they could live on in the kingdom of heaven. He was going to teach them all they needed to know and would be able to go on in his place.

But, remember the disciples were commoners. They weren't devout Pharisees or rich property holders. They were everyday people or worse. They had reputations for fighting and drinking and murder. So why would the Son of Man bless and teach them? Why would he die so that they could live?

In the next part of the reading, we see Peter and he has that "ah-ha" moment. That time when everything just clicks. It all comes together for him. He had always seen Jesus as his teacher, and he knew that he was also the Messiah. But this was when it really clicked for him.

While they were on the mountain, Peter was no longer seeing Jesus as just their teacher. He was seeing him for who he really was. The glowing sunlight enveloping Jesus and the all white robes, elevated Jesus to a new level for Peter. Jesus was now on the level of Moses and Elijah. And we are reminded, like after the baptism, that Jesus is God's beloved son.

I think that it is interesting that Matthew did not report James or John saying anything. And John did not write about his perspective of what happened. But that is a discussion for another time.

Instead, I believe that we need to focus on those "ah-ha" moments. We can learn so much in those short instances of clarity. See what we didn't see before.

The disciples knew that Jesus was the Messiah and that eventually he would leave. But they didn't really know how soon nor how they would play into what happened. But why would they? They were fishermen and a tax collector. They weren't scholars.

But then Peter had that "ah-ha" moment. Everything started to fall into place. He saw Jesus for who he truly was and offered himself to the Lord, much like we do with our prayers and our offerings.

Reveal your presence to us this day,  
O God of light, love, and glory.  
As you did to your servants at the foot of the mountain,  
send your Spirit to show us your story.  
May the brilliance of your face  
illuminate this place  
as we dare to proclaim your Word  
and may we, your people, be never unable  
to tell all of that we have heard