

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the Beloved, Amen.

Well here we are. On the mountain again.

We arrive at this story every year—the story of the Transfiguration. We've just come through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and now we are brought to another mountain entirely. A high place. A place where the air is thin. A place where heaven and earth seem to overlap and the veil between what is and what shall be grows almost transparent.

It's a story we know so well I probably can't tell you anything new about the sequence of events. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John. His face shines. His clothes become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear. A cloud descends. A voice speaks: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." And then—just as suddenly—it's over. They come down the mountain.

Every year, right before Lent, the church gives us this story. And I've often wondered why. Chronologically, Jesus has already faced the wilderness. He has already endured forty days of temptation. That's usually where we begin Lent. So why this shining moment right before we step into ashes and repentance?

It is almost as if the church, in her wisdom, knows we need encouragement before we begin the long walk toward Jerusalem. Before we give up chocolate, or coffee (never!), or scrolling on our phones. Before we take on prayer disciplines and fasting and reflection. Before we look squarely at our own mortality and sin.

We need a glimpse of glory before we face the cross.

And friends, this year, that feels especially true.

Because this week, our province has been shaken by tragedy in Tumbler Ridge. Lives cut short. A community reeling. Families devastated. The kind of news that makes your stomach drop and your heart ache before you even know all the details. The kind of news that prompts the same ancient question: Where is God that this should happen?

It's the question children ask with disarming honesty. It's the question young adults whisper when trust has been fractured. It's the question the grieving cry out when words fail: Where is God in this?

On the mountain of Transfiguration, God seems unmistakably present. Radiant. Audible. Clear. A voice from the cloud. A visible sign. No ambiguity. But most of

life does not feel like a mountaintop. A lot of life feels like the valley. Like confusion. Like sorrow. Like headlines we never wanted to read.

And so the tension between this shining story and our present reality can feel almost unbearable.

We might even struggle, as modern Christians—and especially as Lutherans who are comfortable with metaphor and mystery—to know what to do with a story like this. It was written decades after Jesus' life. It is layered with imagery. It defies easy explanation. Jesus doesn't morph like a caterpillar. He doesn't glow like a lantern. The Gospel simply tells us he was transfigured—revealed.

Revealed as who he truly is.

The Transfiguration is not about Jesus becoming something new. It is about the disciples seeing what has been true all along. The glory that was always there is unveiled, if only for a moment.

And maybe that's what we need right now—not a new God, not a different promise, but eyes that can glimpse what is already true, because the temptation in moments like this is to believe that God has left the building. That once upon a time God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve, led Israel with pillars of fire,

raised up prophets, and came in flesh as Christ—but now? Now we are on our own.

People look at suffering and say, “If God is real, where is God?” They look at violence and ask, “Why does this keep happening?” They see religion misused as a weapon and wonder if faith has anything left to offer at all.

And we in the church sometimes respond defensively: “That’s not us. That’s not the kind of Christians we are.” But if we are honest, silence can wound just as deeply as harmful words. Inaction can be as heavy as wrongdoing.

In the face of tragedy—whether in Tumbler Ridge or anywhere else—we cannot simply retreat to the mountain and try to build shelters like Peter suggested. “Lord, it is good for us to be here,” he says. And of course it is. Who wouldn’t want to stay in a moment of clarity and glory?

But does Jesus let them? No- Jesus does not let them stay.

The voice from the cloud does not say, “Build dwelling places.” It says, “Listen to him.” And so they come down and that may be the most important part of the story. Because the mountaintop is not the destination but rather is the place of preparation.

It prepares them for the cross. It prepares them for confusion and fear. It prepares them for Good Friday. It plants within them a memory of light that will not be extinguished even by death.

And perhaps that is what this story does for us, especially in a week like this. It plants within us a memory of light to keep with us even when the shadow of suffering falls on us.

Not a naïve denial of suffering. Nor a simplistic answer to complex pain. But a deep assurance that the one who will walk toward Jerusalem, who will stretch out his arms on a cross, who will cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—that one is the Beloved. And he is with us still.

So where is God in Tumbler Ridge?

God is in the tears of parents and friends who mourn. God is in first responders who show up in the darkest hours. God is in counselors and clergy who sit in sacred silence. God is in casseroles delivered to doorsteps by neighbors and in embraces that hold grief without trying to fix it by friends. God is in the people who show compassion even to the shooter who caused such pain and suffering

through their brokenness. God is in the systems that seek to destroy cultures of bullying and fear that may have contributed to it all.

God is not absent from the valley. God has chosen to meet us there.

The same Jesus who shines on the mountain will kneel in Gethsemane. The same Jesus who is affirmed by the voice from the cloud will hang between criminals. The glory and the grief belong to the same story. And that means our response cannot be passive.

If the Transfiguration reveals who Jesus is, it also reveals who we are called to be. We are not meant to wait for a cosmic light show to fix the world. We are called to bear the light we have been given that just last week was called to shine forth.

Think about how often we see glimpses of transfiguration even now. After wildfires tear through communities in British Columbia, strangers open their homes. After floods wash out highways, volunteers organize supply drives. When hatred rises, others link arms to protect the vulnerable. When despair creeps in, someone says, “What can I do?”

I have seen it in this congregation. Quilts stitched with prayer. Generosity offered quietly, faithfully. You have been the hands of Christ more times than you probably realize, and that is not sentimentality. That is theology. Because if Christ is risen, and if his Spirit is alive and active, then the church is not a museum of past glory. It is a living body. It is Christ transfigured into the world through ordinary people.

Does that mean we will solve every tragedy? No. Does that mean we will always know what to say? Certainly not. Sometimes the most faithful thing we can do is sit in silence and weep with those who weep. But it does mean we refuse to believe that darkness has the final word.

Even on the mountain, the disciples are terrified so much so that they fall to the ground. And then Jesus does something so tender we might miss it. He touches them. And he says, “Get up. Do not be afraid.” He doesn’t explain everything or hand them a plan to fix it. He touches them. He speaks courage. And then they walk down the mountain together.

Friends, that is our calling too. To let Christ touch our fear. To hear him say, “Do not be afraid.” And then to walk into the valley—not alone, but together.

The tragedy in Tumbler Ridge does not undo the promise spoken on the mountain. It makes that promise all the more necessary. "This is my Son, the Beloved." Beloved in glory. Beloved in suffering. Beloved in death. Beloved in resurrection.

And if he is the Beloved, then so are those who grieve. So are those who question. So are those who feel lost. So are we.

Lent is coming with its ashes to be traced on our foreheads. We will remember that we are dust. But we will also remember that we are dust loved by God. Dust into which the breath of life has been breathed. Dust that has been claimed by Christ.

The Transfiguration gives us a vision to carry into the wilderness. It reminds us that even when we cannot see clearly, even when the headlines are heavy, even when the valley feels endless, the light has not gone out.

So let us open our eyes.

Let us look for transfiguration not only on mountaintops but in hospital rooms, in school hallways, in small northern communities, in kitchens and sanctuaries and quiet acts of courage.

Let us be brave enough to listen to him.

And then let us go down the mountain, trusting that the One who shone with glory also walks beside us in sorrow—and that through his love, working in our hands and hearts, this world is still being transfigured.

Thanks be to God. Amen.