

The Transfiguration of Our Lord – 2022

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Hebrews 3:1-6

Luke 9:28-36

Songs about home can pack an emotional punch. As we get older, we reminisce about the places where we grew up. Childhood can be such a delightful time. There is a beautiful “carefreeness” to being young. A golden hue is attached to places we loved as children. A single magnificent day can make a mark on a youngster that lasts a lifetime. Musicians attempt to capture those emotions in their songs to pass on to their audience. Most of you could sing every line from Penny Lane or Strawberry Fields. Those are real places that Paul McCartney and John Lennon knew as children. The best of these pop “home songs” is by Creedence Clearwater Revival. It’s titled “Green River.”

Well, take me back down where cool water flows, y’all. Oh, let me remember things I love. Stoppin’ at the log where catfish bite, walkin’ along the river road at night, barefoot girls dancing in the moonlight. I can hear the bullfrog callin’ me, oh. Wonder if my rope’s still hangin’ to the tree. Love to kick my feet way down the shallow water, shoo fly, dragon fly, get back to your mother, pick up a flat rock, skip it across Green River. Home; I expect that all of y’all have images in your mind of home. Where is home?

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain to pray. Not long before this, Peter had embarrassed himself. The Lord was teaching His disciples: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). The gossip on the street was conveyed as their answer – all of it was obviously off-kilter. Jesus then locked in on the Twelve and asked them directly. “But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Peter was eager to answer. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Brilliant! Peter nailed it! Jesus is elated and tells everyone exactly how this confession came tumbling out of the mouth of Peter. “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). Then Jesus, flush with the disciples’ awareness of who He is, teaches them what it means *to be* the Christ. Death; Jesus told them what awaited Him in Jerusalem.

Here's where Peter embarrasses himself. He actually presumes to tell Jesus the Lord’s business. Peter took the Son of God aside and attempted to rebuke Him. “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matthew 16:22). What?! Without too much subtlety, Jesus puts Peter in his place: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man” (Matthew 16:23). So up the mountain they go, about eight days later. And out of nowhere, Jesus is transfigured, changed. His appearance became dazzling white. His divine glory is shining through His humanity. Astounding! True God and true man in one person. You can’t see this and not be floored. You can’t see this and not be inspired. This Man rules the cosmos. This is truly God – God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. Being in His presence you know, there is nothing that this Man cannot do. The Father’s voice is heard from the cloud: “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” (Luke 9:35). At that moment, Peter thinks to himself: “You got that right. I’ll listen from now on.”

They came down that mountain, didn't they? Not long after this episode, St. Luke writes this: "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). You get the sense that Peter wanted to stay up on the mountain. "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah" and then Luke adds this little editorial bit, "not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33). Sometimes Peter is just a little bit out of his element. Does that remind you of you? Good; Peter helps us learn. First, Peter did not want Jesus to suffer. Oh, Peter loved Jesus' teaching, he loved the miracles and the crowds and the spiritual depth, the authority that Jesus clearly possessed, the glory of the truth, the exhilaration that God was at work, but he does not want Jesus to suffer. On the mountain, where God's glory is obviously abundant, Peter wants to stay. But they come down, don't they?

What did they face after that? Growing hostility, antagonism from those with human authority, an oppressive weight begins to build that is difficult to shoulder. Dark days, hard days, troubling days. There were threats around every corner. Jesus is pursuing His goals with great confidence but His teaching is creating enemies, those with earthly power and unholy motives. Suffering becomes almost a certainty. Before all this tumult takes place, before all the conflict with the Pharisees, before the authority of Jesus is publicly challenged, before the whispers of trying to put Him to death become open shouts, before the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, before the bogus trial and whipping the crowd into a frenzy to call for His blood – before all this horrible injustice, before this radical spiritual trial, what did Jesus give Peter, James and John? He showed Him His glory.

It was heavenly. Peter is right – that would have been a dang good place to stay. Away from trouble, away from hardship and struggle and pain – away from suffering. But that was not God's plan. I suspect that life is going to become difficult. Are we prepared to suffer? For our faith, in a broken world, are we prepared to suffer and retain our optimism, our hope and our trust – are we prepared for hard times? Is this our home? Man was built for Eden, Paradise. That is our home; heaven. We are pilgrims here, strangers to this land, this broken creation. If earth is your ideal, you are not prepared to suffer. Here's a little dose of Bible. "Jesus said: 'I have said these things to you, that *in me* you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world'" (John 16:33). Luke writes in the book of Acts that Paul and Barnabas were encouraging the believers in Lystra and Iconium and Antioch. What were they saying? That it is "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Are we prepared to suffer? Is this our home? How many of you are eager for heaven? Do you rehearse in your mind its beauty, its peace, its joy and its comfort? Do you pine to see the face of your Savior – the One who loved you and gave Himself up for you? Jesus gave Peter and James and John inspiration before the arduous journey they were about to endure. What does Jesus give us? What have we received from His hand that is fuel for our spirit? He has told you, shown you, how highly treasured you are. Forgiven; Christ shed His holy blood to cleanse you, to bring you life, to forgive your sins. You are forgiven! God shows you His glory every time you hear of Christ and Him crucified (God's glory is abundant in this place). His resurrection triumph is the reality that has been fused into your soul. You are a new creation. You are impervious to death for Christ's resurrection has been anchored into your being. Death has no

sting. Christ has triumphed over death. The evil one, who used a tree to bring death into this world, has been defeated by the Son of God hanging from a tree. You eat the fruit of His body; you receive the intoxicating wine of heaven by drinking His blood. What more could any human being receive from God than what you have received?

Even more, you have been placed within a sturdy body of believers. That's what a Christian congregation is – a home away from home (a home away from heaven but so very near to heaven). We are bonded, brothers and sisters in the faith who are headed home together, a place better than Green River (or wherever it is that you grew up). We need to be prepared for whatever the Lord has in store. Peter, James, and John came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and then, ultimately, found themselves at Golgotha. We are about to journey through Lent. Ash Wednesday is the valley of the shadow of death. We fear no evil. Why? Because God is with us. His cross and His empty tomb, they comfort us. Forward we go. Tethered to the world-redeeming Savior, forward we go.