



Liturgical Day: The Transfiguration of Our Lord
Date: February 18, 2007
Sermon Title: Four Keys to Faithful and Effective Leadership

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

THE TRANSFIGURATION

This morning, we celebrate a major festival in the liturgical calendar. It is called "The Transfiguration of our Lord." St. Luke tells us that Jesus made his way up the mountain in order to spend a night in prayer – something he often did before major events or major experiences. He took his inner circle of followers, Peter and James and John, along with him. They had the chance to spend a night on a mountaintop, in prayer with God's only son, which was remarkable enough on its own. But it got even better. When the night had grown long, and the disciples' eyes were heavy with sleep, they saw something absolutely amazing: Jesus was transfigured before their eyes. The appearance of his face was changed, and his clothes became glistening white. And they saw him standing there with two men: Moses and Elijah; two of the greatest heroes in the Hebrew Bible.

Peter's first reaction, as usual, was to do something. Awed by what he had seen, and not knowing what else to say, he blurted out, "Let's build three monuments here Lord: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Now this isn't an unreasonable response. He had just witnessed an unbelievable sight. It was only natural that he would want to memorialize it. It was only natural that he would want to respond by worshipping. But that obviously was the wrong thing to do. Jesus didn't say anything, but God did. As Peter was speaking, great cloud engulfed the four of them. Fear engulfed the three disciples as well. And from that cloud issued the words: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him."

The very next day, as they are making their way down the mountain, while the glow of that experience had not even begun to fade, they find themselves in the middle of a great crowd, where Jesus immediately returns to serving the people: proclaiming the good news, and healing the people of what ailed them.

Transfiguration Sunday is an important day in the liturgical calendar, and in the story of Jesus' life and ministry. His talk with Moses and Elijah helped him to prepare for what was to come in Jerusalem. And the image of those three together helped his disciples as they began to discover who he truly was.

Today is an important day here at Saint Peter; not as important as Transfiguration Sunday was to Jesus, but important nonetheless. Today we are honoring willingness of sixteen Saint Peter members to serve as our elected leaders in the coming year. They were elected to serve at last week's Annual Congregation meeting. I'm not sure how many of them would describe that meeting as a mountaintop experience. But I hope that each of them – last week at the annual meeting and this week as they are installed as our leaders – I hope each of them experiences the touch of God on their hearts, calling them to be strong and bold and creative and faithful as they lead us into this coming year.

What will it mean for them to be faithful in this call? What does it mean for congregational leaders to exercise wise stewardship over the responsibility that is given to them? This morning's text provides some clues. In the words and actions of Jesus and his followers, we become aware of four keys to being a faithful and effective leader in this church named after Christ.

FIRST LESSON
EXODUS 34:29-35

PSALM
PSALM 99

SECOND LESSON
2ND CORINTHIANS 3:12-4:2

GOSPEL LESSON
ST. LUKE 9:28-43

PRAYER OF THE DAY
O GOD, IN THE
TRANSFIGURATION OF YOUR SON
YOU CONFIRMED THE MYSTERIES
OF THE FAITH BY THE WITNESS OF
MOSES AND ELIJAH, AND IN THE
VOICE FROM THE BRIGHT CLOUD
YOU FORESHADOWED OUR
ADOPTION AS YOUR CHILDREN.
MAKE US WITH THE KING HEIRS
OF YOUR GLORY, AND BRING US
TO ENJOY ITS FULLNESS,
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR
LORD, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS
WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT,
ONE GOD, NOW AND FOREVER.
AMEN.

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PRAYER

The first of these four keys is prayer. Whenever there was an important decision to be made, or whenever a significant event was about to occur, Jesus would prepare himself. He would prepare, most often, by spending an entire night in prayer. Think about that. We describe Jesus as being fully God. Yet he had to spend time praying – connecting with God – before knowing how to move ahead. If that was important for Jesus, how much more is it important for us human beings? If we are to have any chance of being faithful and effective, we must ground all that we do in prayer.

The church needs leaders who have a robust prayer life. Leaders who spend time every day, searching their hearts for what God is saying to them. I pray that our leaders here at Saint Peter will discover a love for, and a reliance on, the gift of prayer.

TRANSFORMATION

The second of the four keys to being a faithful and effective leader is the desire for transformation. On one level, Transfiguration Sunday tells the story of when Jesus was transformed. Luke tells us that his clothes became dazzling white and the appearance of his face changed. We are reminded of Moses, who also met the presence of God on a mountain top. It is said that when Moses returned from speaking with God, his face had such a powerful glow that people were afraid to spend time with him. As being in the presence of God transformed Moses, so too it is the case with Jesus.

But there is a deeper level at which this is a story of transformation. Those who spent time with Jesus often found that they, themselves were transformed by his presence. Sadly, it doesn't seem that Peter and James and John were transformed in today's text – the very next day they seem to be among the disciples who were unable to help the man with the sick child. But eventually they were transformed. The time they spent with Jesus transformed their minds, and they began to see themselves and their world in an entirely new – an entirely different – way.

The church needs leaders who have the desire to be transformed by their faith. Not leaders who want to do what has always been done; not leaders who desire to promote their own interests or their own agenda. But leaders who are willing to spend time in the presence of God, and who are eager to discover where God will lead them, what God will reveal to them, and how that will help them to become new and different people. I pray that our leaders here at Saint Peter will long for the kind of transformation that only God can provide.

LISTENING TO JESUS

The third of the four keys to being a faithful and effective leaders is the capacity to listen to Jesus. As Peter, James and John stood by in awe, a dark cloud overshadowed them and a booming voice issued from the cloud. It had one, simple message: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Listen to what Jesus says.

Our Lutheran church has a strong tradition of believing that there is power in the word of God. Although Martin Luther was the most famous of the sixteenth century reformers, he once claimed that he had nothing to do with the changes that took place in the church. It was the word of God, he said, that changed the church. He was little more than a delivery boy.

The church need leaders who believe in the power of God's word, and who will study God's word diligently. This morning, I have a gift for each of our new leaders: it is a study Bible purchased for them by one of our members. I hope they will carry this Bible with them wherever they go. I hope that you will become accustomed to seeing them with their Bibles, at worship, at Bible studies, at meetings, and at other church functions. And as they open them up, I hope you will see well-worn pages – signs of the hours spent digging through the scriptures, and seeking to be touched by the power of God's word. I pray that our leaders here at Saint Peter will have a love for the word of God, and allow it to touch and shape their hearts.

LIVES OF SERVICE

Finally, the fourth key to being a faithful and effective leader is a life committed to serve the world. When Jesus and the disciples came down from the mountain, the very first thing they did was to throw themselves back into the center of the crowd and begin touching their needs again. We worship a savior who gave himself for the world in many more ways than simply dying for it. He also lived for the world, and his life was centered around what he could give to those he met from day to day.

We are called to be his disciples, which means nothing less than to shape our lives after his. As he committed himself to serve those who had needs, so too, the most faithful among us do the same.

The church need leaders who are committed to lives of service, always seeking to discover how they and the church they lead can be of service to the world that surrounds them. It is as we find a purpose outside ourselves that the church begins to have a future, and I pray that our leaders will lead us in that direction during the year to come.

IN CONCLUSION

Peter, James and John became strong leaders in the early church – strong because they were people who lived in the presence of God, and became God’s presence in the world. These four keys were part of the combination that allowed Peter, James and John to be faithful leaders in the early church. These four keys will be part of what makes this year’s group of elected leaders faithful and effective here at Saint Peter. And these four keys will also be marks of our own faithfulness in supporting them and working with them.

Let us join our leaders in spending time every day in prayer, in opening up our hearts to ways that God might transform us, in listening to what the word of Jesus has to say, and in committing ourselves to serving in the valley of need that surrounds our congregation.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (February 18, 2007)

English Text: ⁱ

^{9.28} Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹ Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴² While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God. ⁱⁱ

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/index.html.

ⁱⁱ St. Luke 9:28-43, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

Greek Text:

^{9.28}Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ τοὺς λόγους τούτους ὡσεὶ ἡμέραι ὀκτώ [καὶ] παραλαβῶν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰωάννην καὶ Ἰάκωβον ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι. ²⁹καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ προσεύχασθαι αὐτὸν τὸ εἶδος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἕτερον καὶ ὁ ἱματισμὸς αὐτοῦ λευκὸς ἕξαστράπτων. ³⁰καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο συνελάλουν αὐτῷ, οἵτινες ἦσαν Μωϋσῆς καὶ Ἥλιος, ³¹οἱ ὀφθέντες ἐν δόξῃ ἔλεγον τὴν ἕξοδον αὐτοῦ, ἣν ἤμελλον πληροῦν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ. ³²ὁ δὲ Πέτρος καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ ἦσαν βεβαρημένοι ὑπνώ· διαγρηγορήσαντες δὲ εἶδον τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς δύο ἄνδρας τοὺς συνεστῶτας αὐτῷ. ³³καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ διαχωρίζεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἀπο αὐτοῦ εἶπεν ὁ Πέτρος πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν· ἐπιστάτα, καλὸν ἐστὶν ἡμᾶς ὧδε εἶναι, καὶ ποιήσωμεν σκηναὺς τρεῖς, μίαν σοὶ καὶ μίαν Μωϋσεὶ καὶ μίαν Ἥλιῳ, μὴ εἰδῶς ὃ λέγει. ³⁴ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ἐγένετο νεφέλη καὶ ἐπεσκίαζεν αὐτούς· ἐφοβήθησαν δὲ ἐν τῷ εἰσελθεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν νεφέλην. ³⁵καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῆς νεφέλης λέγουσα· οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος, αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε. ³⁶καὶ ἐν τῷ γενέσθαι τὴν φωνὴν εὐρέθη Ἰησοῦς μόνος. καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐσίγησαν καὶ οὐδενὶ ἀπήγγειλαν ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις οὐδὲν ὧν ἑώρακαν.

³⁷Ἐγένετο δὲ τῇ ἑξῆς ἡμέρᾳ κατελθόντων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους συνήνητησεν αὐτῷ ὄχλος πολὺς. ³⁸καὶ ἰδοὺ ἀνὴρ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου ἐβόησεν λέγων· διδάσκαλε, δέομαι σου ἐπιβλέψαι ἐπὶ τὸν υἱόν μου, ὅτι μονογενὴς μοί ἐστιν, ³⁹καὶ ἰδοὺ πνεῦμα λαμβάνει αὐτὸν καὶ ἑξαίφνης κράζει καὶ σπαράσσει αὐτὸν μετὰ ἁφροῦ καὶ μόγις ἀποχωρεῖ ἀπο αὐτοῦ συντρίβον αὐτόν. ⁴⁰καὶ ἐδεήθη τῶν μαθητῶν σου ἵνα ἐκβάλωσιν αὐτό, καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνήθησαν. ⁴¹ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ὧ γενεὰ ἄπιστος καὶ διεστραμμένη, ἕως πότε ἔσομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ἀνέξομαι ὑμῶν; προσάγαγε ὧδε τὸν υἱόν σου. ⁴²ἔτι δὲ προσερχομένου αὐτοῦ ἔρρηξεν αὐτὸν τὸ δαιμόνιον καὶ συνεσπάραξεν· ἐπετίμησεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ καὶ ἰάσατο τὸν παῖδα καὶ ἀπέδωκεν αὐτὸν τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ. ⁴³ἔξεπλήσσοντο δὲ πάντες ἐπὶ τῇ μεγαλειότητι τοῦ θεοῦ. Πάντων δὲ θαυμαζόντων ἐπὶ πάνσιν οἷς ἐποίει εἶπεν πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ· ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Luke 9:28-43, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart). To display the Greek text correctly, choose Palatino Linotype font.