



Pastor Ken's Sermon

SERMON – TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

MARK 9:2-8

FEBRUARY 14, 2021

“NOT A ONE!”

My wife Marcella's ability to remember dates is uncanny. On Friday she recalled for me that on Friday, February 12, 1982 when she was a senior at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, she had been selected to lead the morning chapel service. If you've ever experienced writer's block you know it's a crummy enough thing to have happen when a college paper is due – it's worse when you're supposed to preach in front of your classmates and not a few college faculty at 10:00 AM – and it's already 3:00 AM and the block isn't budging.

To the rescue in those wee hours came her good friend Barb, who'd been a Bible Camp counselor the previous summer, dug up her notebook and hit on one of those feel good, *“Chicken Soup for the Soul”* stories counselors use for morning devotions. But it was a good story – and a timely one, because it was a Valentine's Day story. Seems a kid named Chad had recently moved to a town in rural Virginia and was all but shunned by his classmates. A heartbroken mom saw her boy come home each day walking by himself, trailing the other kids, head down.

No matter - a couple of weeks before Valentine's Day Chad decided to give a card to his new classmates – 35 in all. His mom feared the worst – 35 heart shaped *“won't you be my valentine”* distributed – not a one received. Mom turned out to be right. Her son, as usual trailing the other kids carrying their card boxes, carried an empty one. But as he came through the door Chad was surprisingly upbeat – saying over and over *“not a one... not a one.”* She took that to mean he'd not gotten a single card – which he hadn't. What Chad meant is he hadn't forgotten anyone in his class that day – everyone got a card – the new kid remembered every one of them!

The moral of the story is of course - 'tis better to give than receive. But that only goes so far when you are nine years old and you receive meanness in exchange for kindness. Oh sure, it was a lesson learned...a “keep your chin up” moment. But recently, when this story surfaced again on the internet as I suspect it does every year at this time, there was a post from...Chad. Stories get embellished over time and re-telling, but he said in his post that the bulk of what is out there is true – it all pretty much happened that way on February 14th, 1977.

But the 'rest of the story' is that it caused this 3rd grader to think a lot about people like him in this world – how many day in and day out for one reason or another feel what he felt, friendlessness, personal loneliness, the feeling you might not only be unloved but unlovable. And he went on to say the incident may have propelled him to become a mental health counselor in order to help people who hurt, most of the time silently - invisible people. Rejection changed Chad – ultimately for the better, it made him strong and compassionate- a good combination.

Our gospel lesson is a story about change – a very dramatic one. But it's debatable if Jesus really did change that day – or simply that he appeared, for a moment, an hour or the whole day we don't know – differently. The church in its calendar assumes this event happened as Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem

for crucifixion, fulfilling a prophesy of Isaiah 53, which said of the servant of the Lord, *“he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hid their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”*

After three years of ministry, Jesus had his share of rejection. Mostly because of what he said, the increasingly clear inferences people living comfortably in authority or in their sin were drawing from what Jesus was speaking to them with both religious and moral authority that they could not refute. Jesus had also attracted a considerable following— largely because of what he did for people.

In the season of Epiphany – concluding today, we read of how Jesus revealed himself to the world by healing the sick and freeing people from demons - signs that he was something special. This new kid in each town he visited found the unloved and unlovable and ... he loved them in quite demonstrable, physical ways. People more and more came to him, not for his own sake, but because of what he did for them. But as Pastor Paul Hinlicky remarked in a Transfiguration sermon – *“If all we want of Jesus is his gifts – we will never have him.”*

The Transfiguration story is about nothing other than HIM. There is no other point to it. Jesus does nothing. Peter tries in vain to say and do something – which is when a cloud covers him, and a voice in so many words says, *“Peter, you’re here to listen”*. Everything in this story is done by God, whom Jesus called Father through whom we have received the same privilege. The entire point of this story is that God wants us to have Jesus. Not for what he can do for us (though in Jerusalem he would soon do something of unsurpassable importance for us), or not because he can help us get our way. But because to know him is to know a love that changes us – which may have been what God had in view all along!

There is nothing wrong with looking to Jesus to help us. We routinely pray, in Jesus name, for all sorts of things not to be polite to those who ask us to pray for them or because we’ve been taught *“it’s the Christian thing to do”*, but because we believe Jesus can help us. The stories that precede Transfiguration about healing and freeing and reconciling mean what they suggest – God does these sortsof things.

I don’t want to overplay my hand here – which comparisons of Jesus with anything or anyone else on this bedeviled sphere we call earth can do, but from our story today the real lesson may be that God simply wants us to know his Son, which is what the command to listen to him is all about. Listen then to this *“rejected one”* who though he died, returned to his Father in glory saying; *“not a one...not a one...there is not one I forgot – I died for them all.”* Quite something to be loved like that, is it not? AMEN