

Sermon of February 27, 2022

This week, our hearts have broken as we have seen pictures of bombings and war in the Ukraine. We see the mass exodus of people flocking to the borders trying to get away from the violence. And we're left wondering why. When it comes to politics, it's hard to understand why. It's hard to understand what will likely happen next and because of that confusion and lack of knowledge, we are scared. We can let that fear dictate our thoughts and actions or we can turn to our faith. We trust God is with the people of Ukraine. We trust God is with Vladimir Putin. We trust God is with President Biden and his cabinet working for justice and we trust God is with us. But what can we do in this time of fear and uncertainty? We can speak out and use our voices to bring peace and justice. We can reflect God's light into places where that light has gone out. And friends, we can pray.

Today we celebrate the transfiguration. This story is important because we find it in all three synoptic gospels. It's important to help us understand the faith we cling to in times of war. Jesus has just told his disciples, right before this story, of his impending death and resurrection. The transfiguration story happens 8 days later. You can't help but wonder if the disciples are questioning if Jesus really is the Son of God. I mean, how can the Son of God die? Do I really want to follow this guy? So Jesus, Peter, James and John go up the mountain to pray and we know when Jesus begins to shine and Moses and Elijah suddenly show up. Have you ever wondered why Moses and Elijah? Why not Abraham? Why not Isaac or Jacob? They're really important figures in our faith. Why Moses and Elijah.

Moses was commanded by God to speak up against Pharaoh, commanding him to free the Israelite people from slavery and let them go to the land the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob promised them. Of course, Pharaoh said no. Through Moses, God revealed God's power, causing Pharaoh to eventually free the Israelites.

We need a Moses, now. We need someone to help deliver the Ukrainian people fleeing from violence and war to safety. We need someone to speak God's truth to the Pharaohs of the world. But remember, it took time for Pharaoh to say, "Go." It is in that space between slavery and freedom we trust. We trust that God is working. God was working in the heart of Pharaoh and God is working in the hearts of the leaders of the world, today.

Elijah was a prophet as well. He stood up to the power of King Ahaz and Queen Jezebel of the southern kingdom of Judah. King Ahaz had led the people astray by

worshiping the false god, Baal. Elijah was commanded by God to kill all the priests of Baal and destroy their altars. By doing so, God would reveal God's power to the people and call them back to God. Through Elijah, God changed the hearts of the people of Israel and brought them back to God. We need an Elijah. We need a prophet who is willing to stand in the faces of the powerful and speak God's commands to them.

So why Moses and why Elijah? Because, Jesus, like Elijah, stood up to the powers that were wrong. And Jesus, like Moses, stood up to powers that treated people unjustly. But unlike Elijah and Moses, Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus shines light into the places of the world that have lost the light of God. The thing I love most about this story is that Jesus never changes. He transforms into light, but the same Jesus who walked up the mountain is the same Jesus that walked down the mountain. The people who change are the ones who listen.

Returning to the story, a cloud came and surrounded them. From that cloud came the voice of God saying, "**This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!**" Now we've heard this before. In chapter 3, when Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened and a voice said, "This is my son, my beloved, with him I am pleased." It's similar and yet, God in the transfiguration is telling us that Jesus is chosen for a special purpose and therefore, we are to listen to him. Listen to Jesus! When we listen to Jesus tell us he will die and be resurrected. When we listen to Jesus who dies on the cross so nothing; not sin and not death, nothing can separate us from God. Not war, not violence, not death. Listen! God is always with us.

Listen! And we will be transformed. It's tempting to think we will be like Jesus and shine God's light into the world, but friends, we are not the one who is shining, Jesus is shining through us. We reflect the light to those places in the world that have lost the light of God. We reflect that light by speaking out against leadership when what they are doing is wrong. When we speak out against leadership that are treating people unjustly.

But can one voice really make a difference? Can one light really help? Jesus preached and people listened. They began to follow him. Soon, Jesus had crowds following him, but really, who cares. It was just one voice. Jesus kept speaking, even when the authorities told him to stop. Jesus spoke, people listened, and a movement began. The problem was, people listened. The powers had to stop Jesus speaking and people listening. They had to stop Jesus because he was upsetting the balance. They silenced him on the cross, but God cannot be silenced. God sent Moses to speak out for the people. God sent Elijah to speak out for the people. God

sent Jesus, to speak out for the people. God sent the Holy Spirit to give us God's authority to speak out for the people, too. Can one voice really make a difference? Of course it can. Because that one voice can be joined by another and another and another until that one voice can no longer be ignored. King Ahaz couldn't ignore Elijah, Pharaoh couldn't ignore Moses, and we cannot ignore Jesus.

So what can we do, today to help those in the Ukraine and to speak out for justice and peace? Friends, we can pray. I want to end my sermon today in prayer, using a prayer written by our national bishop, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.

O Lord, God of life, as you care for all creation, give us your peace. May our security come not from weapons, but from respect. May our strength come not from violence, but from love. May our own wealth come not from money, but from sharing.

May our path be not one of ambition, but of justice. May our victory not be one of revenge, but of forgiveness. Unarmed and confident, help us to defend the dignity of all creation. Sharing today and always the bread of solidarity and peace. Amen.