

“It’s Good to Be Here”

(Based on Mark 9:2-9)

What had I gotten myself into? The bus was snaking its way up the mountain. Often having to cross into the other lane to navigate the next corner. More than once Jan grabbed my arm or was that me grabbing her arm? Finally we made it to the drop off spot. Okay our tour guide shared, from here you walk up the rest of the way. Really? Walk up? Okay we have risked life and limb this far. So what’s a little walk! The path looked good. I guess I should have asked myself was I ready to walk the path!

Up we climbed. As we did so my chest grew tighter. My breathing became more laboured. I thought I was in pretty good shape -- why is this so hard. Then I heard an ambulance at the drop off spot arrive. I thought I hope that isn’t for me. I paused for a moment bent over to catch my breath. This is harder than I thought. Maybe the bus ride was the easy part! ☺ I

continued to move up the mountain. 20 minutes later I made it to the top of the crater and inside I could see a little steam rising and as I turned away from the crater I could see the ancient city of Pompeii. It was not quite a dot but it didn't look that close. Made me respect the power of a volcano when the eruption buried a town that far away. It was really a magnificent view from there. Over 4,000 feet (1,281 meters) above sea level. When we finally reached the top of the mountain the view and the experience were well worth it. The climb that was still a question mark!

This week in conversation with some of the GUM ministers and the new executive director at Chalmers Vicki Olatundun we started talking about the transfiguration and Jesus walking up the mountain with his disciples. We talked about what was going on at the transfiguration. We found ourselves talking about transformation and seeing life in new ways.

Paul Miller mentioned a memorable line about transfiguration Sunday. “We all want transformation, we just don’t like change.” Let me say that again, “We all want transformation; we just don’t like change.”

It was a bit like my walk up the mountain. The view was great from the top. The work, the risk, the challenge was putting one foot in front of the other. It was trusting the bus driver to make the corner. It was not giving up when the breathing slowed down and my body and mind were questioning – what are you doing!

We all want transformation but do we really want to do what is needed?

It is one of the great questions as we greet this passage in Mark’s gospel. Surrounding this mountaintop climb are a variety of questions and notions of Jesus. Jesus is affirmed as a Messiah one moment by Peter and told by Peter Jesus could not be a suffering one in the next. James and John were interested in seats of

privilege with Jesus and didn't hear that they were to be servants. Peter, James and John come up the mountain with Jesus. Was it a camping trip to sort things out or a time to reveal for us that even the disciples struggle to understand who Jesus was? They wanted a Messiah but maybe not the servant, suffering one that Jesus presented. Change is not easy.

What makes change so hard for many? For you? For me?

I know for me it usually means having to admit something about myself I would rather not or commit to a new pathway of action or take the time needed to be different. It seems easier to just complain, or deny or procrastinate. We all want transformation; we don't like change.

Anne Lamott shares from her life two words that have helped her with change. They are: Thank you. She shares, "It is easy to thank God for life when things are going well. But life is much bigger than we give it credit for, and

much of the time it's harder than we would like. It's a package deal, though. Sometimes our mouths sag open with exhaustion, and our souls and minds do, too, with defeat, and that saggy opening is what we needed all along. Any opening leads to the chance of flow, which sometimes is the best we can hope for, and a minor miracle at that, open and fascinated, instead of tense and scared and shut down. God, thank you.

She continues, "We and life are spectacularly flawed and complex. Often we do not get our way, which I hate, hate, hate. But in my saner moments I remember that if we did, usually we would shortchange ourselves. Sometimes circumstances conspire to remind us or even let us glimpse how thin the membrane is between here and there, between birth and the grave, between the human and the divine. In wonder at the occasional direct experience of this we say, Thank you." P.44, 45 *Help, Thanks, Wow* by Anne Lamott

Anne is reminding us, it is good to be here. The disciples that day were given that glimpse between human and divine. They didn't really grasp what had happened at the time, but Peter at least recognized that something unique, special had happened and he was able to utter, "It is good to be here Jesus."

Perhaps that is the start to the transformation we need, the change required. We see something in a new light, a different way, the journey has shifted. The transfiguration revealed to us at least that Jesus was more than just the teacher and healer we talked about a couple weeks ago. He was a part of God's plan and God's initiative to change the world. He is showing us a divine glimpse of Jesus which we may need to keep in mind as he makes his way towards Jerusalem and the challenges of Holy Week. The disciples and we have been given a seed to take root. Jesus is one who reveals more to us. Let us

break open the seal even a little to see when might shine through.

It is good we are here.

Change often begins with this glimpse. Since today is Valentine's Day I thought I would offer a story of transformation in my life. It was 33 years ago that Jan and I were first engaged. But the story as all stories usually do started somewhere else first. As a teenager I was shy when it came to girls. Not talking with them so much. I had a sister and in some ways talking with girls was the easy part. Asking them on a date was a whole other matter! In fact my love life was pretty limited through high school and university. My heart I kept pretty safe from hurt. It wasn't until after my second year at Emmanuel that I finally decided that I would have to risk the safe heart if I wanted a companion. I would need to risk opening up the seal. My boarding family in New Brunswick that summer Bob and Anna Banks thought I was

a Casanova. It seemed like I had three different women in my life. One I wrote to; One who I talked on the phone and saw in person and one who visited out of the blue. I always blamed Bob for telling me the story of Zobra the Greek. All I remember about the story was that Zobra didn't want to live with regret. His advice I heard was to go for it. I needed to open some light around my heart and see where it led. The summer didn't lead to the complete change. But the one I was writing to was a woman named Jan Embree. It started the change in my heart and my life.

It was good to be at Bob and Anna's home. It started me on a new path.

The transfiguration stands at the end of Epiphany and the start of Lent each year. Its importance is found in seeing Jesus in a new way, a greater way -- a window opened for a moment, a light that changed the view, an affirmation that Jesus was in good company.

We need these moments of transformation in order to help us take the steps of change.

So as we face some moments of possible change in 2021 as we talk about how the United Churches may work together, as we ponder moving forward with our sanctuary renovation i.e. monetarily, as we face personal struggles and challenges, perhaps a mountain top experience will help us open the seal. Mountain tops are only reached after some effort to climb. Some parts of life are only seen after saying thank you for what is around us. The journey to the plain of life invites us to move with new insight and conviction. Transformation is tied to change.

On the climb, enjoying the mountain top or the return to the plain below, it is good you are here with us Jesus. We often need help to see a little light.

Sermon delivered by Rev. Bruce Dickson at Dublin Street United Church, Guelph, ON for Sunday, February 14, 2021. For personal use or study purposes only.

