

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 2

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9

Sermon February 19th, 2023

God's Great Affirmation!

The disciples have been following Jesus down this path for quite sometime. And though they have witnessed God's grace, healing, and new life through Jesus' words and actions. The walk down this path has been anything but easy. They have stumbled many times along the way. They have doubted. They have struggled to heal as Jesus heals. They have faced persecution for standing with Jesus against the reigning authorities. They have rejected those Jesus has welcomed. In the story leading up to our gospel for this week, Jesus tells the disciples that he will have to suffer and die. In response to this news, Peter rebukes Jesus. Peter rejects the path Jesus is called to walk down. "No way should the Messiah have to suffer and die to liberate God's people" Peter thinks.

The disciples are coming to a crossroad in their ministry with Jesus. They want to continue to follow Jesus down this path, but they are getting tired from all the challenges they have had to face along the way. Jesus can see that some of his closest friends might be ready to walk away. They need some kind of affirmation, some kind of sign from God to show them that this is the path that they are called to continue to walk down.

Like the disciples, we can find ourselves coming to crossroads on the paths we are invited to walk down in our lives. For example, being in a relationship. You meet someone who you are attracted to. You start dating. You enjoy each other's company for the most part. You are ready to become more serious. But you need to work through some insecurities you are feeling. You have been arguing more lately, which doesn't help. You have dealt with some life events that are causing additional stress on your relationship. These challenges have led you to this crossroad. You see the potential of this relationship. You are pretty sure this relationship can grow into something great. But the doubts are creeping in. You are needing some affirmation, some sign from God to help you see that you two are ready to take the next step. You two are called to keep walking down this relationship path.

Or being in a career, or job. When you start out, you are excited at all the possibilities. You are meeting new people. You are learning new things. You believe what you are doing can change the organization and maybe even the world for the better. Then after a while you start to face some challenges. Maybe there is a boss or co-worker you are not getting along with. Or you messed up on a project, and feel a little less secure in

your employment. Or you are longing for something different. You are stuck in a rut, and need a new challenge. You come to a crossroad in your career/job, and need some affirmation, some sign from God to reassure you to keep walking down this career/job path.

Or being involved in a ministry in the church. The pastor or team leader sees that you have gifts to share in this ministry, or there is a real need, and you are willing to try something new. And so, invites you to help out. At first, the ministry is exciting. You have hope that this ministry can flourish, and breathe new life into people. You bear witness to God's grace, healing, and new life happening in the things you are saying and doing through this ministry.

After a while, this ministry starts to struggle. Less people are being impacted by this ministry. Other things in your life are starting to pull your attention and energy away from this ministry. You doubt yourself. You doubt the future sustainability of this ministry. You feel stuck. You are tempted to give up. You come to a crossroad, and need some affirmation, some sign from God that you are meant to keep going down this ministry path.

On all the paths we are invited to walk down in our lifetime, we come across crossroads where we listen for God's affirmation/sign to see if we are meant to continue to walk down these paths.

Sometimes we do bear witness to this affirmation and keep walking.

And then sometimes God invites us to walk down a new path. Sometimes we have to say goodbye to the path we have been walking down.

Of course, there are also times when we don't listen for God's direction or affirmation. Sometimes we force ourselves to keep walking down a path even if God is pointing us towards a new path.

Sometimes we get off the path too early, because we are unable to face the challenges that come with walking down the path we are called to walk down.

In our gospel, Peter, James, and John, are invited on a journey with Jesus up a mountain where they experience God's great affirmation. They do so when Jesus' appearance changes before their eyes, affirming Jesus's identity as the Messiah. They do so when bearing witness to Jesus' encounter with Moses and Elijah, two profound people in the faith of Israel. Giving affirmation that Jesus too, has an important purpose. They do so when hearing God's voice affirm that Jesus is walking down the path he is supposed to. Yes. Jesus will suffer. Yes. Jesus will die. Yes. Jesus will be raised on the third day. Yes. This is my Son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

As Peter, James, and John come walking down the mountain, they feel affirmed in their calling to follow Jesus. This important moment will carry them through many trials. Including their momentary rejection of Jesus.

Jesus' transfiguration experience is God's great affirmation that breathes new life in the disciples, giving them what they need to keep walking down this path even through the suffering and death that will come.

In the church year, Transfiguration precedes Lent. It sets us up for the journey ahead. A journey where we bear witness to Jesus' struggle in the wilderness, Jesus' struggle with the authorities, Jesus struggle at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus struggle at Golgotha.

A journey where we choose to give up something to reflect on this suffering Jesus endures so we can also reflect on the promise of new life God has to offer us through Christ.

The paths in our life are not always easy to walk down. Most of the time we face suffering and struggle along the way. Sometimes it can be hard to keep walking. Sometimes we are not meant to keep walking.

But whatever crossroads we find ourselves at, we are invited to listen for God's voice. Whether it is this trans figurative voice that affirms for us that we need to keep walking down this path, or an invitation to walk down a different path.

Let us pray, loving God, when we find ourselves standing at crossroads on the paths you invite us to walk down, open our ears to listen to your voice. Your affirming voice. Your guiding voice. Pointing us in the direction we need to walk. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

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