

THAT EIGHTH DAY AGAIN
Sermon, February 7, 2016
Transfiguration Sunday
Text: Luke 9:28-36

Many of you may remember the number eight is biblically significant. As mentioned a few weeks ago, the baptismal font has eight sides. There is a reason for that; it is not just decorative. The eight sides of the font are witness to what theologians call the Eighth Day of Creation, which is the day of Jesus' resurrection, the First Day of God's new re-created order. Just as the Jews were brought into the covenant through circumcision on the eighth day, just as the world was recreated via the eight people on the ark, so re-creation begins on the symbolic eighth day ... hence the eight sided font, where we are liturgically united with Christ in our baptisms. We are given new life in Christ, united with Him in His death, and reborn with Him in His resurrection on the Eighth Day, and launched into a life of service to Him. The empty tomb on the eighth day is the pivotal point of the Gospel which holds the old and the new, the past and the future together. In that tomb, God intruded upon the created order. In that tomb, God began His new order of a new heaven and a new earth, which, if you skip ahead to the end of the book, the apostle John writes about in the final chapters of Revelation ... the final, complete restoration of all things. And, as Luke tells us, the Transfiguration took place on an eighth day ... coincidence? Maybe. (*some other biblical "octa-coincidences" among many: David was the eighth son of Jesse; there were eight writers of the New Testament.*)

The story of the Transfiguration is told by Matthew and Mark as well. Matthew 17 ... "*After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James and led them up a high mountain by themselves.*" Mark 9:2 – "*After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.*" But Luke begins his version of the story: "*About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him ...*" Uh, oops. Wait a minute. Eight days, Dr. Luke? Matthew and Mark wrote after SIX days. Was it six or eight days after? And ... after what? We'll look at that in a minute.

There is a reasonable explanation for the apparent numerical discrepancy. Think of it this way: All three writers agree at least six *full* days have passed. Now, a week ago today was Sunday, January 31, but only six FULL days have passed since last Sunday (*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday*); we are only about ¼ through the seventh day since January 31 was over. Also, keep in mind that in Jewish thinking, sundown, (not sunrise) begins the day. We can reasonably assume that "*after six (full) days,*" on maybe the morning of the seventh day, Jesus, Peter, James and John started the climb up this high mountain. Suppose they had dinner after this long hike, and maybe even fell asleep; after all, we ARE told Peter, James and John were very sleepy when the Transfiguration took place, so it is highly likely this event took place after sundown. So, as the Jewish day begins at sundown, it is now the eighth day. So, in a sense, Matthew, Mark and Luke are all correct ... the likely scenario is that it was after six full days they started this hike, they spent the light of day hiking, and this wonderful scene most likely took place after sundown. So, it was "about eight days after."

Now ... after *what*? Luke tells us it was AFTER Jesus said "this." What's the "this?" After Jesus said ... what? Well, look back a few verses. All three Gospel accounts are in agreement in preceding the story of the Transfiguration with this event: Jesus had asked His disciples, "*Who do you say that I am?*" In response, Peter made his memorable confession, "*You are the Christ, the son of the living God.*" Now, this is one of those crescendo moments in the New Testament. Peter confesses, puts into words, what they all have come to believe ... they have come to the realization they have actually been actually walking and talking and sharing life with God in the flesh, the Christ, the long hoped for Messiah! However, after that wonderful pronouncement of faith, Jesus then changes the whole mood and atmosphere and tells them, "*The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.*" And He continues, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" So again, right after Peter says, "You are the Christ!" Jesus starts talking about suffering and rejection and being killed and carrying crosses. There was only one reason men carried crosses in that day; a man carrying his cross in

first century Palestine was on his way to die. Condemned men carried their cross to the site of their execution. That's the picture of discipleship and self-denial Jesus is painting. Jesus never tried to bribe people into becoming His followers by the offer of an easy way; He challenged people then and He challenges people now to follow Him, come what may.

I'm sure the disciples are thinking, *"Rejection, suffering, pain, self-denial and difficulty ... that isn't what we signed up for. We want to save our lives; after all, that's why we want a Savior, right?"* In Matthew and Mark, when Jesus starts talking about suffering, we are told Peter began to rebuke Him. When he did that, Jesus turned on Peter and said, *"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things and the ways of men."* As I've pointed out when we've looked at this before, I don't think Jesus was actually calling Peter Satan. I think he was saying, *"You know, Peter, you sound a lot like that fellow I spent forty days in the wilderness with, you know, the one who was trying to tempt me to take the easy way out."* I think Jesus was basically saying, "Get behind Me. Get back in line; Peter, because you are out of line! Don't get ahead of Me, don't run away from Me, don't walk counter to Me. Get *behind* Me, and follow."

In his book entitled Not That You Asked... Andy Rooney comments about aging, *"The middle of the night seems longer than it used to."* If you have ever laid awake mulling over a nagging worry, a deep hurt, an anxious regret ... "Oh, I wish I hadn't said that, I wish I hadn't done that, I wish things could have been different" ... you know what he is talking about. Such sleep-disturbing moments seem to happen more frequently as we age ... the longer we live, the more time we've had to accumulate regrets about what we've done or said, or not done or said, which can certainly exasperate our sleeplessness ... and added to that are all the worries associated with aging and health. The sleepless hours late at night can be mighty long and lonely. Well, metaphorically speaking, the disciples were in the middle of a really long night of tossing and turning lasting, oh, about eight days. As far as the Gospel records show, nothing much happened during that time. I'm sure they were all wondering all week long, *"What's going to happen to us? We left everything when we decided to follow this man, we've made sacrifices, we made decisions ... just to face suffering and difficulty and possibly death?"* THEN ... *"About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning ..."* And Luke continues, *"Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him."* There is Moses, there is the great prophet Elijah, and they are there talking with Jesus ... they are all talking together regarding the things about to happen, which, though initially difficult, are all a part of a divine, glorious, orchestrated plan that will have glorious results!

So, in the middle of their (with apologies to the Beatles) "Hard (8) Day's Night", when their hearts were heavy with anxiety and worry and possible regret, Jesus confirms for them beyond any shadow of a doubt Peter's confession made eight days earlier, that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Yes, Jesus would have to go the way of the Cross, the way of betrayal and rejection and suffering and death, but on the other side of all this He would be raised to this eternal glory being displayed right now before Peter, James and John's eyes. Yes, He was going to suffer and the road ahead is difficult, but Yes, all will be well; the end will be glorious! The disciples are given a glimpse of how it will all turn out. By being given this intense, dramatic, real vision of glory, they can now see that no matter what they may have to endure along the way, it'll be worth it!! The story will turn out well. And in case there was any doubt, the voice of God spoke loudly and clearly, "THIS IS MY SON ... LISTEN TO HIM."

And so as we prepare to enter this season of Lent, let us again be encouraged with this reminder: The Eighth Day tells us there is a dawn that follows every darkness. The Eighth Day tells us there is hope that follows every despair. The Eighth Day tells us there is a beginning that follows every ending. The dispirited disciples needed that Eighth Day vision, they needed to catch a glimpse of the glory to come, and when they did, they were able to get their lives back on track again. And that's what many of us need to know in the middle of our long nights, whatever they may be. We need to know that God is still God. Christ is still Lord. We need to know and trust that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes. Yes, He is the Christ. **Yes**, there's a hard road ahead. And Yes, be assured ... this road leads to a glorious end.