

TEXT: Mark 9:2-10

TOPIC: Following Jesus' transfiguration, Peter, James, and John wonder what "rising from the dead" means.

SUBJECT: Jesus' transfiguration represents a metamorphosis that awaits people who face pain and suffering.

TITLE: The Way Within Reach

Tuesday was not a good day for me. I can't tell you why because I don't understand it myself, but I was off my game Tuesday.

Maybe this is too personal. I don't know. Maybe it isn't personal enough. I don't know that either. Whichever, I was off my game Tuesday. Some days are like that, aren't they?

Do you ever have days like that – days you are off your game – and you don't understand why? Sometimes days like that feel painful and dark and even violent when all you crave is light and life. Maybe it's just a first-world thing for me; I know I could have it far worse.

I think days like that show up unexpectedly like a toothache when the ways within reach. You don't know how you got the toothache, and you brush and floss your teeth regularly, but there are the cavities on the X-Ray that are making your mouth hurt.

When the way is within reach, though, the life of faith looks different. At times, it may not feel very good. So, when you climb the mountain and see the transfiguration, God takes you from death to life. Transfigurations of light and life move people from inaction to participation in God's kin-dom. When the way is within reach, the greatest challenge will be moving toward suffering, darkness and violence. Only when you do, let God's light and life radiate through you. God's ways are within reach; all that's required is just going with God.

PRAYER

It never occurred to me until this week how difficult it must have been, not for Jesus and the disciples he took to witness the transfiguration, but for the disciples who weren't asked to travel up the mountain.

Readings around the transfiguration are filled with darkness, suffering, and violence. When John the Baptist opposes the puppet king, Herod, John's killed. In addition, people have been flocking to Jesus because they are hungry and sick in mind and body, and they have no other treatment options. Jesus also predicts his impending death and has that little "get behind me Satan" exchange with Peter. And while Jesus and his inner circle of disciples have uploaded themselves to the cloud on the mountain, the rest of the disciples struggle to cope with the darkness, suffering, and violence of daily life. They've been dealing with a boy possessed by a demon and they forget one crucial thing in their attempts to exorcise an evil spirit from the boy. They forget what they were taught. They forget to pray. This matters because it speaks right into the difficulty we face when the way for us is within reach. *Keep that in mind.*

When the ways within reach, it can feel particularly difficult to get unstuck because suffering, darkness, and violence have a way of making people feel stuck. Often, people get stuck because they need to move toward something that makes them uncomfortable and even anxious. When people move toward something that makes them feel stuck, they recognize how the ways within reach. In other words, it's one thing to wait on God to transform your life so you can see the light, but waiting on the Lord to give your life a different form, a different way of living, and a different way of being requires your willing participation.

The ways are within reach when people know God is lifting them from the darkness, suffering and violence into light and life. Sometimes the darkness, suffering, and violence will make you feel stuck, but that's only an illusion. Gods got this and God's got this so you don't have to. God's got your back.

Maybe that's why days like Tuesday come along; so they can easily be forgotten.

I tend to think the difficulty of darkness, suffering, and violence comes in two forms. One form of suffering happens people tell themselves they aren't willing to be vulnerable enough to have the courage to see through it, or when people let others tell them something can't be done, so they choose to believe what others say rather than God. In each instance, it's like turning to an addiction to try and buy salvation. God made life to be more than a transaction from darkness, suffering, and violence to a life of light and life. God put the way within reach of our lives but to go the way God intends, it is an imperative to go with God. We go with God when we search the scriptures, pray, and know God is guiding our lives; in a transfiguring moment, we see the brilliance of the white light, and God welcomes us to welcome our transformation.

So, the transfiguration story. We know the story. We just heard it. Jesus goes up a mountain and takes Peter, James, and John with him. A cloud appears and Jesus' clothes become a dazzling white. Jesus meets with Elijah and Moses. The three disciples are speechless, so Peter suggests erecting an historical marker to commemorate the occasion. When they come down the mountain, Jesus tells them to tell no one until he had risen from the dead, leaving the disciples wondering: "What's this rising from the dead?"

Rising from the dead doesn't happen to Jesus alone; rising from the dead is what happens to you and I when we work with God and God exchanges light and life for darkness, suffering and violence. Like Jesus, we rise from the dead when we recognize the old ways of doing things have become myths and legends that don't work in times such as the ones we find ourselves now, and God is ready to introduce to us a new way of doing things. Rising from the dead – from darkness, suffering, and violence – to light and life brings new life to people when

they realize the transfiguration wasn't just for the disciples' benefit, but also for our benefit, since most of us are just like the disciples who didn't ascend up the mountain with the Lord. Rising from the dead gives us the light and life that has patiently waited for us.

When the way is within reach, I think God gives us space, so we can see for ourselves whether we've learned from life lessons. At some point the Teacher needs to let the student show what they've learned because the light that shines in the student is the light the Teacher placed there, and it is the same light that shines from us into a world that's waiting for it.

Most of us have experiences of walking through darkness, suffering and even violence and when darkness, suffering and violence ascend – like they did Tuesday for me – it can be frightening. When that happens, though, light and life are waiting to be received.

So, in prayer find out how God will move you forward toward the transfiguration that awaits you and the transformation that will change everything. It might just be the prayer the disciples forgot, but keep in mind prayers provide for the roadmap God intends each of us to ascend and descend through darkness, suffering, and violence toward light and life. God's got this. God's got this so you don't have to. God's got this and God's your back.

The last thing anyone in the world wants to do is move toward the pain and suffering – the darkness, suffering and violence – of life, but until you move toward it and go through it, it may be impossible to expect or experience the light and life of the transfiguration that embraced Jesus and the three disciples. But when people move toward and through the darkness, suffering, and violence – a glorious metamorphosis awaits.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.