

Where You Are

Part 2: Far Horizons

INTRODUCTION

Having considered the familiar where we are, we now raise our vision to the horizon and ask, “Where are we going?” Perhaps a better question is, “Who are we becoming?” Living in the light of the epiphany of the incarnated Christ, we are called to become more—more as individuals certainly, but also more as a community. In Part 2 of the “Where You Are” series, we will look at aspects of this beloved community and consider if this describes who we are and who we want to be. Some of this is within our grasp already, and we celebrate our strengths. But some of it may seem like a far horizon as we seek the Spirit’s strength to grow into our calling as the body of Christ.

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – ***Left Everything and Followed***

February 9, 2025

[Luke 5:1-11](#)

Color – Green

WORSHIP PLANNING

We are talking about priorities this week. In what do we put our trust? By what scale do we measure our value? This could be a day for a statement of faith to remind us where our allegiance lies. Like Peter in the boat, we have the opportunity to leave everything and follow Jesus—or to reaffirm our commitment to follow unhesitatingly.

That, of course, means we need space for confession. We have made this commitment before and yet have mixed up our priorities again and again. In the face of the purity of Christ’s invitation and presence, we see how far we fall short. This need not be a groveling, painful expression, but an admission of the distractions of this life and the longings of the self that keep us from the ability to keep our eyes on Jesus day by day. We wrap our confession with an invitation to the Spirit to sustain us in our weakness and sinfulness and guide us when we stray.

The emphasis needs to be on commitment. Is there space for an altar call? This is not necessarily for a first-time commitment, although that is always welcome. But there could be space and time for a recommitment or reaffirmation of the desire—the whole community’s desire—to follow in the way of Jesus. It could be traditional with people coming forward to the Communion rail for laying on of hands or simple prayer support. It could be done through writing with cards left up front, placed in the offering place, or as folks left the sanctuary. There could be a time of anointing for commissioning to the task of living one’s faith in the world each day.

Singing the hymns of the faith can also confirm our commitment to be followers, disciples, of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. “Here I Am, Lord” or other hymns of being called and responding to that call can give us the will to put our faith into practice once again and live into the future that we are becoming. This is where we are, the community with a destination in sight, the kin-dom of God.

PREACHING NOTES

In the conversation within our Gospel text this week, we learn that it hadn't been a good night for Simon. Fishing was done at night in those days. The fishermen would spend the night in the shallows, tossing their nets and pulling in the catch. Then as dawn broke, they would bring the fish to shore and sell them at the market. Because of a lack of facilities for preserving fish, this was a daily event. Except this day.

This day, for Simon, was a hungry day. He had nothing to sell, nothing to take home for his family. Nothing. It might have been that he was still sitting in his boat because he didn't want to go home and tell his family that he had nothing. It might have been that he was sitting there feeling empty, worthless, and shallow—until that man came and asked him to go out into the deep.

Luke says that Jesus was teaching, and everyone kept pressing closer and closer. The crowd grew and pressed in to hear. So, Jesus looked around for options and saw Simon Peter sitting there in his boat with failure on his hands. So, Jesus stepped in and asked if Simon would mind rowing out a little way so that Jesus could teach without risking getting wet.

Isn't that an amazing thing? A little invitation, a small inconvenience, and before you know it, Simon was in over his head. Did Jesus show up that day looking for followers? Or was that a bonus? The catch of the day?

What was the lesson that day? I find it interesting that Luke doesn't say a word about what Jesus taught. In Luke's haste to get to Simon Peter's story, he skipped over Jesus' words. That's typical, I suppose. We sometimes miss what is right in front of our faces because we want to get to something more personal. We skim over an article to see if our name is there; we glance through the program to find someone familiar; we scan the crowd to find a certain face, and in so doing, we miss everything and everyone else. Jesus may have been talking about paying attention. That was a common theme in his teaching elsewhere, so there is no reason to think it would have been absent here. "Consider the lilies," he would say, "Look there, wheat and weeds growing together," that road, this seed, those fields – Jesus was always asking us to pay attention to what was around us. Like a preschool primer, Jesus said "Look and see."

It was never just the appearance of things that interested Jesus. He was really saying to look deeper. That is what he said to Peter when the teaching was over. "Let's go deep." That's where the drama is, isn't it?

Peter was open. He didn't know it, because he wasn't paying attention, but he was. He was open to going deep, even though it was against his better judgment, even though it wasn't the way things were done in his business, even though he had been unsuccessful the night before. He was open, and that small opening is all it takes for miracles to occur. We need to be willing to look deeper and live deeper. There is so much right in front of our faces, and we miss it.

Peter knew he was in over his head. "Go away from me," that's the first thing he thinks to say in the face of someone who lived so much more deeply than he did. "Go away, I can't handle it; I'm not good enough for it; I don't have the strength." Remember, Peter had been up all night, struggling with his failures. Someone once said that Jesus doesn't come when we are well-rested and ready all that often. Usually, it is when we have labored all night and caught nothing; often, it is when we want to give up,

when we think there is nothing left, and we aren't any good at life. Then Jesus comes and says, "Go deeper."

"From now on you will be catching people." As he did that day on Lake Gennesaret, as he did because he lived deeply. As he has done for the past two thousand years, he gathers up those who long to live deeply and to live aware of life. It is no wonder that when they came to shore, they walked away from the fish, the biggest catch in their careers. They walked away to go deep.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Beloved, the Savior calls to you. Will you follow?

God, help us leave everything and follow.

Christ's call persists through the clouds of doubt, fear, and worry that descend on our path. Will you follow?

God, help us leave everything and follow.

Jesus calls us to shift our priorities, to leave behind the baggage of prejudice and the grasping for position so we can truly love God and our neighbors well. Will you follow?

God, help us leave everything and follow.

Beloved, receive this good news: you are not alone! Today we answer Christ's call together!

God, help us leave everything and follow your path of Love everywhere we go! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Opening Prayer

Some have come under compulsion. Some have come out of curiosity. Some have come out of a great need. Some have come out of tradition. Some have come to dedicate their new outfit. All will meet Jesus. All will have the opportunity to be blessed. All will decide what to do, having met Jesus. May we decide to follow him. Amen.

Written by T. Anne Daniel in *The Africana Worship Book, Year C* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), 126.

Prayer of Confession

O Lord,

forgive us when we fail to respond to your call with faith.

**Through your Spirit,
we rest in the assurance of your acceptance.**

Forgive us when we are shackled
by our narrow understandings of discipleship
and our clouded sense of purpose.

**Through your Spirit,
we are drawn into the illumination of your empowering love.**

Forgive us when we are frightened of the future
or pull back from the demand of your calling.
Forgive us when we fail to sense your presence in our past,
to acknowledge your grace in the present moment,
and to trust you for our future.

Through your Spirit, we offer ourselves in discipleship.

We come together as your disciples.

We seek renewed and renewing faith.

Touch us now with your Spirit, Lord.

Touch us now with your Spirit.

Adapted from *Prayers and Readings for Worship*, Volume 2, Peter Judd, ed. (Herald Publishing House, 1996, ISBN 9780830907199), 22. Posted on the **Community of Christ** website, <http://www.cofchrist.org/worship12-13/13-05-12.asp>. Re-posted on the re:Worship website at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/04/confession-responding-to-gods-call.html>.

Benediction

As you go into the coming days, remember:

You do not go alone.

God's faithful love goes with you.

No matter what you are facing,

God will not abandon you.

For You belong to Him,

and He will fulfill His plans for your life.

So go from here,

strong in the knowledge

that God's loving presence goes with you.

Posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/08/benediction-psalm-138-1-8.html>.

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany – *Rejoice in that Day*

February 16, 2025

[Luke 6:17-26](#)

Color - Green

WORSHIP PLANNING

We are familiar with the Beatitudes, Matthew's version of these sayings from Jesus. We aren't as well versed in the Sermon on the Plain, which is our text for this week. There is some overlap between the two, of course, but there are also some significant differences. We tend to turn to these sayings for comfort, to find blessings in our everyday life. Certainly, we can still do that. But there is more in these words, and some of it is a little hard to take. "Rejoice in that day," Jesus says, not about good things that happen, but about suffering, about being hated, about being rejected. This is not something we want to feel joy about. So, what is the invitation that Jesus issues here and how do we practice that as we worship?

This is about trusting in faith and living that faith in community. We don't rejoice because someone has hurt us, but we rejoice because we have a community that can help us heal from the hurt. We have relationships that can insulate us from the suffering that any of us might encounter living in the world. In worship, then, we can celebrate that community of support and encouragement. We give thanks for one another and the way we have been enfolded into a loving environment that helps shape our identity as an antidote to the identity we sometimes encounter in the world.

During a time of passing the peace (if your community does that), consider including a time of saying "thank you" to people in the community who have supported you. Say "thank you" to those who see you as the child of God that you are, rather than a label or a category. Sharing gratitude can foster even more manifestations of support. That is how we grow as a congregation. We are challenged to be more supportive and inclusive.

How can the rejoicing we do in our faith and in our supportive community reach beyond the walls of the church? Our prayers can include those who are not yet a part of the church but need advocates and encouragers. Our songs can remind us that there is a world that is loved by God and in need of a clear witness of hope and transformation. It can be energizing to hear a call to mission once more.

We can also create space for those who are hurting today to find healing and hope among us. Some who will gather with you have been wounded and need to feel that support. We can pray with and pray over.

We could have a time of anointing, and let individuals come and know the love and support of the Spirit and the church. The joy that we seek is not in the hurt that has come from the world or from the church itself but in the faith that sustains and comforts and in the community that is the source of healing and hope.

Remember, in this part of the series, we are looking to the future, to who we are becoming. So, it might be true that right now, we are not an instrument of healing; we have not been as supportive of marginalized people as we could be. But we are casting a vision of who we can be or who we are called to be. We cannot ignore who we have been, but we can claim a brighter future, a future filled with rejoicing.

PREACHING NOTES

Scholars tell us that both Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain are most likely compilations of Jesus' sayings accumulated over a larger part of his teaching ministry rather than one sermon. It is possible that, at various times, Jesus stood or sat to teach and put together these various thoughts in one larger teaching moment. It was a technique the rabbis called "stringing pearls."

The problem is that some of these pearls are hard to hear. "Blessed are you when people hate you." Really? Is that something we should aspire to? Something we should work toward? "Rejoice in that day (that hating day) and leap for joy..." I don't know if this is something I really want to claim in my faith. I know, I've been told as a pastor that if people aren't upset by what I am doing, then I'm not doing enough. In which case, I've done plenty in those days. But I'm not sure that's what he was getting at here. It isn't that we set out to upset people, to do whatever it takes to get us hated. If that were the case, then those who hold up signs of hate in Jesus' name are on the right track. And there is no way in God's heaven that makes sense.

Blessed are you who are poor; blessed are you who are hungry. Are we supposed to just let the poor and the hungry live in their blessedness because someday, there will be a change in their circumstances? Or are we called to be a partner in that change? Are we the promise that Christ gives to those in difficult circumstances?

And what does it mean to promise the kingdom of God? Is it, as so many believe, a "someday" kind of promise? You'll get your reward one day when you die or when Jesus comes back, whichever comes first. Or is there something else going on here? If so, what would that be? Is it something beyond the facile "it will all work out in the end" kind of assurance?

I hope so. I remember more than once dealing with those who were grieving, who were weeping, who were broken. I remember grasping at straws for something of significance to say. I clearly remember thinking Luke, chapter six, verse twenty-one: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." And I remember dismissing it from my mind because I knew it wouldn't be heard. And I knew enough of the situation to know that it wouldn't easily be made right; there was no simple or easy happy ending on the horizon.

So, what do these verses offer people in desperate situations? Hope? Well, yes, there is hope. There is a promise of reversal. There is resolution for even the most complex, the most broken of situations. And

we who stand in faith must never lose our hold on that hope. It is what drives us to keep working, to keep giving, to keep loving, even when we don't see a solution on the horizon.

But these verses tell us that this hope comes packaged in a relationship: "Yours is the kingdom of God." Even the most desperate people are still worthy of love, welcome, and hospitality. There is room at our table, room in our inn, room in our circle, even for the hurting, even for the weeping.

That is why when folks are hurt and withdraw from community, the healing takes so much longer. That is why seclusion is detrimental to hope. The kingdom that is offered is a community, a relationship of healing and hope. That relationship is, of course, first and foremost with Jesus the Christ, the author of hope, the source of healing. But it is lived in the here and now, in the everyday, with the human community we call the church, a place of acceptance and inclusion. At least we hope so; at least we strive to be that community, that reflection of the kingdom.

Did you notice that some verses are future tense: you *will* be filled, you *will* laugh. But some are present: yours *is* the kingdom. We can be right now the place of filling and the place of healing or learning to laugh again. We can't fix the problems with a snap of the fingers, but we can be a part of the solution—if we hang in there together.

Maybe the rejoicing is about recognizing an opportunity to grow closer, to deepen our relationships by entering into the brokenness and standing with those who have been hurt. We may not have the solutions or have them quickly or easily, but we can journey together. And in so doing, we know we celebrate the presence of Christ and the making of and being made into disciples.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Jesus declared, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

May we learn to depend on God's abundant provision instead of the world's grasping for wealth as we worship today.

Jesus declared, "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled."

May we learn to follow Christ's call to provide for the hungry as co-creators of God's kingdom as we worship today.

Jesus declared, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

May we learn to pay attention to those who suffer and mourn and to extend God's comfort and hope to those who need it as we worship today.

Jesus declared, "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man."

May our worship teach us to rejoice in that day and every day as we live out the good news in our families, neighborhoods, community, and world!

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Opening Prayer

Compassionate God,
we recognize that our world is a broken place,
hurt by poverty, famine, and disease.
We admit that sometimes we make the world a broken place,
tolerating prejudice, conflict, and self-interest.
We confess that our hearts also suffer with anger,
Resentment, and jealousy.

Renew us in Your love, O God,
and heal us with the comfort of Your abundant love.
Awaken us to the role we can play in healing Your creation.
Strengthen us through the power of the Holy Spirit
to hear Your word and move forward in faith. Amen.

Written by Gill Le Fevre. Posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2019/02/opening-prayer-luke-6-17-26.html>.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful Lord, we pause to confess that sometimes we listen to the advice of the ungodly. We know better, but for some reason, we listen anyway. Forgive us. The lure of a quick fix, easy money, or pleasure turned our heads away from you, Lord. Forgive us. We knew it was wrong as soon as we did it, but pride kept us from backing out of our decision. Forgive us. Teach us the joy of being righteous. Show us how to delight in being holy. Remind us that new life in Christ means new thoughts, new ways, new decisions. Forgive us for failing to trust you in all things. Amen.

Written by Kwasi Kena in *The Africana Worship Book, Year C* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), 144.

Benediction

Beloved, go today in the blessing of Christ, who calls you, equips you, and accompanies you as you live out God's justice and joy wherever you go! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany – ***Do to Others***

February 23, 2025

[Luke 6:27-38](#)

Color - Green

WORSHIP PLANNING

You might argue that listening is something we do well. We gather week by week and listen to sermons, listen to the choir sing, and listen to the leaders guide us through the liturgy. But are we really listening? When Jesus says, “I say to you that listen,” he is asking for something more than people hearing words. He is asking for engagement, for what some call “active listening.” Some of the things he asks of us are hard to hear. “Love your enemies” isn’t something that sits easily on our ears. So, how do we make space for active listening to the word for today?

What if before a prayer is prayed or a litany recited, there is space and direction to read and consider? The pastor or worship leader would be inviting the community to live into the words, rather than simply repeating them. “Listen to your own voice,” you might say. Claim the words we say and the prayers we pray. Claim them as your own. Wrestle with them; chew them over; let them be real to you.

When we hear this word, it comes as a challenge. We might say we don’t have enemies, but we live in an oppositional age. There are always folks on the other side, those with whom we disagree. We are challenged on how we treat them, how we speak to them, and even how we speak of them. How can we practice this as we worship together on this day? What words can we use to replace some of the ones we hear used all week long? Is there liturgy that can speak to our divisions? Are there songs we can sing that speak of building bridges rather than walls? What prayer can we learn to pray for those who oppose us, those with whom we disagree, those whom we might call enemies? What confession can we make that acknowledges our reluctance to see the other as worthy of our prayers, our grace, our kindness?

Here in this Ordinary Time season after Epiphany, we are reminded that we are seeking to follow a light that would have us live and love differently. Maybe there is space once again to make a commitment to love as Christ loves, not because we have never said this before, but because we need to hear it again from our own lips.

PREACHING NOTES

What did you say? How’s that? Come again? How many ways can we say, “We don’t understand”? That we didn’t catch what was said; that we couldn’t figure out the meaning, or that we have to confess we were distracted by something and completely missed that someone was talking to us. How many ways can we express that? Millions, no doubt. Millions of ways for millions of times. The truth is, we don’t listen all that often. We assume; we fill in the blanks; we wait for our turn to insert the brilliant and cutting remark formed with our rapier-like wit when the other was droning on about something.

Our passage for this week begins with Jesus saying, “But I say to you that listen...” You that listen? You’d think everyone would listen. It’s Jesus, for heaven’s sake. Someone that important surely wouldn’t have to fight to be heard, right?

Are you listening? You’re not hearing me! Those statements have been made by people who are important to me. It isn’t the importance of the communicator that determines our willingness to listen. It has more to do with removing our fears and setting ourselves aside long enough to pay attention, long enough to stay invested in the conversation. What if our goal was not winning the point? What if our desire was not to figure out how to get our views across, our opinions expressed, our position defended, and our safety ensured? What if, instead, we poured our whole self out in listening to the other? How might that make communication different? How might that help diminish the misunderstandings and the hurt feelings?

I used to hear those statements from Jesus – “Let those who have ears to hear” - as being somewhat judgmental. I viewed them along the lines of the “You snooze, you lose” approach. Take it or leave it. No skin off my nose. But now I wonder. I wonder if there was more of a plea or at least an invitation in these words. It now sounds to me as though he is begging us to pay attention, to lean in and hear the words he has to offer us because he knows these are the words of life; more than anything else, he wants us to have life, to live life, to let life fill us and transform us and give us peace and joy that passes all understanding. “But I say to you that listen ...” And please let that someone be you; please come and sit, stop the noise in your own head for a little while; stop trying to justify your own existence, and let me do it for you! How often I would have gathered you like a hen gathers her brood. Let those who listen be you, my beloved son, my beloved daughter, please.

Yeah, that’s what it sounds like to me these days. At least it did until I read the words he wants us to listen to. One commentator wrote, “Congregations fill stadiums to hear sermons on ‘Three Easy Steps to Love’ and ‘Five Paths to a Better Life.’” If Jesus has preached either of those sermons, we would all find this a whole lot easier, but Jesus insists on preaching the word we need rather than the word we want. He gives us the hard stuff.

Read the Gospel text for this week again. Is it any wonder he had to beg us to listen? Are these words we really want to hear, to really listen to, and perhaps change our lives around? Well, no, let’s be honest. We live in a world that nurses grudges, that licks wounds, that lives to get even. Talk about swimming against the tide. These words of Jesus here in the Gospel of Luke sound like a note out of tune in the symphony of our lives. Love your enemies? Come on!

Take a look though; take a listen. Listen to this rethinking of how we live in community. “Love your enemies,” he says. But how do we do that? We whine and complain and run off with a million excuses, a million justifications as to why that not only won’t work but it isn’t even humanly possible. Listen Jesus, what you are asking is not going to work in the world in which we live. Whether we are talking about international enemies, where an expression of love for those enemies will get us labeled a traitor to our nation or soft on terrorism, or bleeding hearts, or who knows what else; or talking about personal enemies who make our lives the living hell that it can be from time to time until we develop enough backbone to get rid of them. Surely, you aren’t asking us to just put up with bad treatment because Christians are supposed to be the welcome mat for the world, allowing anyone and everyone to wipe their feet on us!

"Slow down," he would say, "Just listen for a moment, please?" Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."

But how in the world...

Shh, listen. Bless those who curse you.

Are you kidding me? Those no good

Quiet! Listen. Pray for those who abuse you.

OK, now you've gone too far, Jesus. That just isn't right; to put up with abuse is simply wrong, just wrong.

Listen, please just listen.

Watch what he does here. On one level, he repeats the same charge four times. Love your enemies. Love those who hate you. Love those who curse you. Love those who abuse you. The repetition is to make the point. But on another level, he is shifting the call. Love, do good, bless, pray for. Do you see; do you hear? Jesus doesn't tell us to just take it. He doesn't tell us to be the doormat of anyone and everyone. What he tells us is, don't become them. Don't harbor the kind of hate that allows abuse and cursing to happen. Turn it around. Turn it over. But notice the distance, "do good" means encounter; get close enough to impact a life somehow. "Bless" is at arm's length. When curses are being hurled, you might need to step back. Step back and gather yourself so that you can hurl blessings in return. But step back; blessings aren't in your face; they are laid at your feet. They are handed out at a bit of distance. And then "pray" when the abuser is at work, then get away; get far away; run to safety. But don't carry the hate with you; run from it too. From your safe place, you pray for God's healing and God's love to transform the abuser. Leave behind the inclination to return the hurt as you have been hurt. It doesn't help with healing. It doesn't make right what has been a horrible wrong. Let it go and love. Love from a distance. Or better yet, pray that God's love can do what your love is incapable of at the moment. Pray that will God step in and love your enemies.

Do we lose something in the process? Well, yeah, according to the world, we lose something. According to a revenge culture, we lose something. That's why Jesus goes on to talk about losing. If you always want to be even, what good is that? If you always want payback, what good is that? If you always get love in return for your love, it is really love? The love that surrenders? The love that pours out regardless of the return? The love that is like God.

Why be kind? For the good it does? No. Though it does do good, powerful good. For the feeling it gives us? No. Though those feelings are wonderful byproducts of being kind. Why do acts of kindness? Because that's what God does. And the reward we get is that we can participate in that love. We can love as God loves. That's why we do it: because God does. It starts with listening deeply enough to hear. Jesus speaks to those who listen.

I'm ready to listen. At long last, speak to me. "Love," he whispers, "just love."

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Jesus teaches us, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." But who are the others?

Our enemies and friends, family and strangers.

Jesus teaches us, "Be merciful as your Father is merciful." But what is mercy?

To act with compassion, to help without expecting anything in return.

Jesus teaches us, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." But how do we forgive?

By recognizing enemies, friends, family, strangers, and ourselves as people in need of compassion.

Let us worship God, who loves us and empowers us to love one another with mercy and compassion.

Come, let us worship! Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Opening Prayer

Holy Jesus,

You call us into a life that others have told us is easy, but it is not.

You challenge us to forgive, to love our enemies,

to bless those who curse us.

We want the easy way,

but You have given us the hard path.

Grant us the patience and endurance to journey with You,

to allow ourselves at times to stumble,

to live into the hard way

so that we might fully experience

Your love, grace, and peace in this world,

by becoming a people full of love and grace

and forgiving others.

In Your name, we pray. Amen.

Written by Rev. Mindi and posted on **Rev-o-lution**, <http://rev-o-lution.org/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/02/prayer-people-of-love-and-grace.html>.

Prayer of Confession

God, we are so conditioned to respond in kind.

We are so worried that when the reckoning comes,

we will find ourselves left with the short end of the stick.

And not without reason.

The powerful take and take and lie and lie

and oppress and oppress,

seemingly without consequence.

Teach us to love with skill.

Teach us to love with precision.

Teach us to love with abandon,

trusting that when we step into

the ocean of your abundant love,

we will receive the blessings of your abundant life. Amen.

Written by Todd Yonkman and posted on his website, **Todd Grant Yonkman**,

<https://todd-grant-yonkman.net/2019/02/11/worship-resources-for-epiphany-7c-february-24-2019/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2019/02/prayer-of-confession-teach-us-to-love.html>.

Benediction

Beloved, go from this place ready to *listen*. Listen for the opportunities to extend mercy. Notice the moments to forgive instead of condemn. Watch for the person who needs help without any strings attached. For the blessing of the Triune God goes with you, pouring out mercy and compassion on you so that you may share mercy and compassion with everyone you meet. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Transfiguration Sunday – ***Astounded at the Greatness***

March 2, 2025 - (Last Sunday before Lent)

[Exodus 34:29-35](#) [Psalm 99](#) [2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2](#) [Luke 9:28-36 \(37-43a\)](#)

Color - White

WORSHIP PLANNING

Transfiguration is about astonishment. It is about amazement. It is about awe. It's something that might be hard to capture in worship in your overly familiar sanctuary with the people you know so well. So, how do we capture this sense in our weekly expression of worship? We sing it. And we see it. Art is probably the best way to evoke a sense of awe. This week, then, let us find the hymns that speak of the

wonder of Christ, the amazing love, the transforming grace, the constant presence. There might not be a long list of familiar Transfiguration hymns, but there are many in praise of the Christ who was revealed.

Art can also give us a breathtaking moment when we encounter the wonder and beauty of the world and the Christian story. True, there is a subjective element to art, but the attempt to capture a glimpse of the transfigured Christ or the world in which he walked can bring us to a moment like the one shared on the mountain top that day. Give them something to see, not to explain, or to define, but to express, to hint. Give a glimpse of something beyond the world we see so often we no longer look at it. For example, one pastor took photos of things inside and around the church, but from unusual angles, or really close, so that familiar became something new and different for a moment.

Let our prayers point to the transcendent Christ, even while we express gratitude for the immanent Christ. Is there space for testimony for those who have had an experience of the glory of God in their lives? Can our liturgy speak of a Christ both familiar and unknown? Watch your language as you speak of the one we follow. Do it always, but especially today on this Transfiguration Sunday. The words we choose to describe and depict the Risen Christ matter and shape the thinking of those who gather for worship week by week.

The worship team's task is not to create a worship experience that will knock socks off. Instead, it is about finding ways to point to the one who can inspire a response of awe. We aren't looking for the community of faith to be awestruck by the worship but rather astounded at the greatness of God and the Christ by which we know God.

PREACHING NOTES

The appearance of his face changed (Luke 9:29). The appearance. He didn't look like what they were used to looking at. He looked different. He looked ... more. *Transfigured* is the word that we are used to reading here. That sounds more holy somehow, more theological than to say simply that he changed. But the Greek word here is *metemorphw,qh* (*metamorphothe*) from which we get *metamorphosis*. Or change.

So, what happened on that mountain six days after a conversation about suffering and death? Something. It's hard to say, except by repeating the words that we read there. *The appearance of his face changed*. What they were used to seeing, they no longer saw; something they hadn't seen before suddenly became evident to their frightened eyes. And what did they see? Something well-nigh indescribable. Luckily, there were aids to their seeing all around them to help them define what had happened in front of them.

First of all, there were those other guys. Luke says it was Moses and Elijah. I always wondered how they knew who they were. Did they come with name tags? Were there prompters running around with signs? Or was it one of those "they just knew" kind of things? Maybe Moses had his famous staff - the staff by which he parted the sea and then struck the rock to get water. Maybe Elijah had his wilderness clothes on, a John the Baptist motif that showed he was a man of the desert, a man uneasy with so-called human civilization. Maybe it was a wild look in his eyes. Maybe Jesus called them by name when they appeared. We don't know because not a lot of attention is paid to the two of them. They were there as props; they were scenery for the lead actor; they were in supporting roles on this day. It wasn't about

them. They represented the law and the prophets, the story of the people of God, the heights of the Chosen People. But they were there to draw attention to the one who was the Word of God, the Presence of God, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Luke is the only one who spoke of the conversation among the glowing figures on the mountaintop. They appeared in glory too; did you notice that? It wasn't just Jesus; the others glowed too. But it was the conversation that drew Luke's attention. They were there to talk about Jesus' departure (checking his ticket, reminding him of the security details, perhaps; no liquids; take all the metals out of your pockets, take off your shoes - Moses probably said that, I would think.) He knew about taking off shoes. No, maybe it was something else. Something more. *Departure* in Greek here is ἐξοδον, "exodus." Moses knew about exoduses (Exodi)? He knew what it was to change everything you knew and everything you were, even for an uncertain future. He knew how to embrace that change even through fears.

That seems to be what this odd little moment on top of the mountain was all about—embracing the change, trusting in the one who brings us through; more than that, trusting in the one who calls us to change, to become more, to become like him. At least that was what it seemed like the Voice was saying— the Voice that spoke because Peter got the lines wrong. Peter wanted to stand against change. "Let's set up camp here," Peter said. "Let's just sit; let's just be; let's dig in our heels and hold on to this moment because who knows what the next one will bring. Let us make a declaration that our understanding should never change. We've come this far; aren't we there yet?"

"No," the Voice says, "you've got a way to go yet. You are still becoming."

"Becoming what?" we ask.

Becoming him. This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him. Pay attention to the change, to the metamorphosis.

In what context do we usually use the word *metamorphosis*? I remember science class, and we were talking about butterflies. The process of changing from a rather ugly worm-like caterpillar into a fragile but breathtakingly beautiful butterfly is *metamorphosis* - change. Or maybe it was in earth science, and we are talking about metamorphic rock. Melted by the heat of the earth's core, the rock flows from one form into another. But here's the question: which is the true form of the rock or creature? Or is the before and the after both a part of the whole? Is it a matter of perspective and a matter of timing? Where you are and when you are allows you to see one truth as opposed to another.

What happened on that mountain was not so much a change into something different, but a revealing of the essence of the one who was changed. Jesus became who he was on that mountain, even though he was who he was as he climbed up and then down again. He is always who he is. He is always present in the fullness of his being. We can see only a part of him, the part we need at any given moment. We experience only a piece, a dimension of the reality that is the Christ. And we get used to that; it becomes familiar to us.

But every now and then, we catch a glimpse of something larger, something deeper and more profound. Every now and then, we hear a word that reverberates in our soul for weeks if not a lifetime. Every now and then, tears come to our eyes as we stand on the precipice of glory. Every now and then, a lump comes to our throat as we encounter the depths of love and sacrifice. Every now and then, we climb a mountain and see what we are following in what is most often the darkness of this life. Every now and then, we move a little closer, grow a little taller, move a little closer, and listen a little better. Every now

and then, we catch a glimpse of the appearance of his face. And we are astounded at the greatness of the one we worship, the one we follow. Astounded.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Disciples of Christ, today your Savior calls you to come up the mountain and pray. Will you come?

We will go wherever Jesus leads us.

Will you follow when Christ's glory overwhelms your senses, and you sit astounded at God's greatness?

We will go wherever Jesus leads us.

Will you follow when Jesus won't let you stay on the mountaintop, insisting that you return to the valley where people are hurting and in need of good news?

We will go wherever Jesus leads us.

Disciples, come! Let us worship God, whose glory shines on the mountaintop and in the eyes of our neighbors.

Come, let us worship God, whose glory shimmers all around us, even now!

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Opening Prayer

Lord of the Mountaintop, God of dazzling clothes,
Be with us when we come down from the height of worship
To face a world
That didn't see what we just saw in you.
Show us what to do.

When demons rage through elementary schools,
Let it not be said that your disciples could not cast the devil out.

When violence threatens to engulf our communities,
Let it not be said that your disciples cowered in fear
Or walked on the other side of the road.

When there is peril or fire or flood,
Let it not be said that your disciples cleared the unwanted junk from their garages

And called it charity...

Lord of the Mountaintop, God of dazzling clothes
Show us how to be.

Change us; transfigure us

So that this world might see what we have just seen, and worship you. Amen.

Written by Safiyah Fosua in *The Africana Worship Book, Year C* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), 30.

Prayer of Confession

Lord Jesus Christ, God's glory and love shone through you that day on the mountain and you persisted in revealing that glory and love through your words and deeds; through your life of humble service. We hear again these wonderful words of God "You are my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!" We confess our failure to listen to you because of the influence on our lives of the gods of this world. When this happens, our attitudes conceal rather than reveal your glory and your love.

If we conceal your love

because our pursuit of other priorities

prevents us from seeing and serving people in need:

forgive us, Lord.

If we conceal your glory

because all we reflect is our own self-centeredness:

forgive us, Lord

If we conceal your truth

through our lack of credible witness:

forgive us, Lord.

If we conceal your justice

through our failure to empower those who are powerless:

forgive us, Lord.

If we conceal your mercy

because of our hard and unforgiving attitudes:

forgive us, Lord.

If we conceal your compassion

because of our prejudice and intolerance:

forgive us, Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ,

cleanse our lives of all shameful attitudes of mind and heart

so that we reveal your glory

in and through all we do and say and are.

This we pray in your name

and in the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Assurance of Forgiveness

(2 Corinthians 4:6)

It is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The good news is that we are not only enlightened by our belief in Christ, we are cleansed and we are forgiven!

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Moira Laidlaw on [Liturgies Online](https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/confession-litany-transfiguration.html). Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/confession-litany-transfiguration.html>.

Benediction

Beloved, may God bless you with hearts ready to listen to Christ's voice that calls us from mountaintop to valley that you may be astounded by glory wherever you go. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.