

If you're a football fan, and *especially* if you're a Carolina Panthers or a Denver Broncos fan, today is *your* day! While sports in general don't often excite me, I am captivated by the football fans that have a passion for the finer things, like tailgating. While I've never tailgated before, I hear that it's quite an experience. The die-hard tailgaters park in the same spot year after year. Food, drinks, and a good grill are essentials, I'm told. It is about gathering together with others, spending time in one place, and, in one sense, camping out – even if tents are not allowed.

So too in today's reading we hear that Peter wants to hunker down and hold on to a special moment. We hear that Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain to pray. You may remember how important prayer is for Luke – we saw Jesus pray at his baptism when he received the Holy Spirit, we'll see Jesus pray when he is betrayed in the garden, and we'll see Jesus pray yet again on the cross. Prayer is one of those keywords in Luke.

So here they are on a mountain praying. Suddenly Jesus is transformed in appearance and he begins talking to Moses and Elijah. In both Matthew and Mark we get a transfiguration story similar to Luke up to this point. However, Luke articulates the content of their conversation while the other gospels don't. Luke says that they talk about Jesus' departure, which is to be completed in *Jerusalem*. Let's pause there for a moment. If "prayer" is one keyword in Luke, then "Jerusalem" is another keyword. Luke has one geographical focus and that is Jerusalem. The entire gospel points to the unfolding of Jesus's betrayal, conviction, crucifixion, and ultimately his resurrection in Jerusalem.

Anyway, we've heard the key words of prayer and Jerusalem so far and there's another one hidden in translation. We hear that Moses, Elijah, and Jesus are all talking about Jesus's departure. "Departure" is kind of a boring word – it reminds me more of a trip to the airport than something spiritual. The Greek word translated as "departure"

here is ἔξι|ο|δο|ν (ehks-ah-dahn) coming from the root

ἔξοδος (exodos), which sounds a lot like exodus.¹ Hello, key word!

Exodus is a book in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Exodus we read of the story of Moses who brings the Israelites from slavery into freedom.

In Judaism this is the *prime story* of salvation and how God's chosen people were rescued. Moses is an important player in the story of God's liberation in the Hebrew Scriptures.²

Thus, when Peter sees Moses with the important prophet Elijah talking with Jesus, he rightly identifies the significance. After all, they're on top of a mountain where epiphanies historically happen.

There three influential people have a conversation and Peter wants to tailgate, well actually build some dwellings or tents. This is

literally a mountain top experience that Peter wants to hold on to.

¹ Van Driel, Kimberly Miller. *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word Year C, Vol 1 Advent through Transfiguration*. "Transfiguration: Homiletical Perspective."

² Van Driel, Kimberly Miller. *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word Year C, Vol 1 Advent through Transfiguration*. "Transfiguration: Homiletical Perspective."

I totally get that. We've all had those moments we wish would never end. Maybe it's when you held your newborn child, after an outstanding date, on your wedding day, on your graduation day, at the signing of a contract for a new job, the day you purchased a house, or on a wonderful night with friends or family members. In those moments we want to setup a tent and remain in that feeling, remain in that place, and be with those people forever.

Yet, much like the fleeting moments of awe in our lives, Peter isn't able to hold onto the glorious moment. A cloud descends while Peter is saying how he wants to set up tents and hold on to that moment for a while. A voice reminds the terrified disciples to listen to Jesus, God's son. Then, like waking up from a dream, the haze is gone and there is Jesus standing alone.

After all of that the disciples and Jesus head down the mountain and are caught in the messiness of life. There they are confronted with a

man whose son has seizures. While the disciples cannot heal the boy, Jesus can and does heal the boy.

These two parts of today's lectionary reading seem to be an odd pairing. In fact the scholars who created the lectionary give us preachers the option to skip the story of healing and just focus on the elevated encounter. I was tempted this week to simplify the reading and ignore the healing story. Yet, as I studied the scriptures and read commentaries I had an idea why Luke put the two stories in a row.

The location of the two stories together helps me understand why Peter's request isn't realized. You see, Peter doesn't get a camping trip with the great sages of old because it doesn't fit with Jesus's identity. When Jesus speaks with Moses they're talking about his exodus that will be fulfilled in Jerusalem. Jesus's ministry *is* about exodus. Much like the Israelites' primary form of salvation came

through the outstretched arm of Moses over the Red Sea, so too in Luke the outstretched arms of Jesus will be our supreme act of salvation. “This time, the mighty hand and outstretched arm that accomplishes this salvation is, paradoxically, wounded and stretched out in suffering.”³

This is a monumental shift in Judaism, and for us as well. God is not only in the temple in Jerusalem, but God is among us. We do not find God only in far off mountain top experiences, but rather we find God right here in the messiness of life. We find God in both the beauty and the suffering. We find God’s love on wedding days and in parting of ways. We find God’s gifts in the wealth of the Gold Coast⁴ and the blood-soaked streets of the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood⁵. We find God in birth and death. We find God in mountain top experiences and in the valley of despair. Our God does not simply

³ Van Driel, Kimberly Miller. *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word Year C, Vol 1 Advent through Transfiguration*. “Transfiguration: Homiletical Perspective.”

⁴ <http://chicago.curbed.com/archives/2014/03/20/here-now-the-10-wealthiest-neighborhoods-in-chicago.php>

⁵ <http://chicago.suntimes.com/news/7/71/86038/o-block-chicagos-dangerous-street/>

camp out on high and loft places. Our God *is* among us. *That* is what Peter doesn't understand. Peter missed that it's about Jesus's journey to the cross. The cross *is* Jesus's glory. It's about Jesus's love of those in need. It's about a God who prays deeply and loves freely. *That* is Jesus's identity, and *that* is why they ain't going camping.

This text is another week of a counter-cultural message from Luke. This message is just as hard as some we've heard as of late. The message to push through the comfortable to reach out and be agents of God's healing to the world isn't a glorious mountaintop. It's not a message to setup a tent in the glory, but it's a message to journey among those in need. I know I'd rather camp out in an ivory tower with 5-star service than to bump shoulders with someone different. Yet, I have also been the one who was lost and confused. I have yearned for healing. I have seen God's presence when another journeyed with me to new life.

Today as we ponder the experience of the mountain top and the valleys of life, might we take on the role of the disciples? Can we look towards the valley of Ash Wednesday and look back at the glory of Epiphany as *both* manifestations of God's presence? After all, over the past month we've looked at a variety of epiphanies, or the ways God reveals Godself to us. Some of the ways we've heard are jolting and some are affirming. Today we see that God is not only on the mountaintop, but that God is also in the valley. Today our God shows us that camping out in one place is not God's identity. For our God is on a life-giving exodus. Jesus is Immanuel, meaning God with us.

Friends, God *is* with us. As we begin the season of Lent this Wednesday, as new council members are installed to help lead us, and as we may hunker down for the super bowl, I pray we keep our eyes open like the disciples. I pray we remain alert to the manifestation of glory all around us – both in this place and in our lives. Today come to *this* table of welcome and see clearly the

presence of God. Come and experience the glory of God. Experience the gifts of God's love in both wine and bread. Taste the goodness of God. Feel the freedom of love. See the haze of God's presence in the incense. Come and know God's presence in both the mountaintop and the valley. Amen.