



Sunday, February 14, 2021
Mark 9:2-9 (Transfiguration of Our Lord)

Pastor Chris Marien

Out of Darkness

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Back in the old days – before the turn of the century – back in 1990, a singer/songwriter named Gloria Estefan was traveling in her tour bus when the bus was hit by a semi-truck and crashed into a tractor trailer in Pennsylvania. Her husband and son received minor injuries, but Gloria was critically injured with a broken vertebra. During the year that followed as she recovered from her injuries, she wrote a song that brought her back into the public eye, “Coming Out of the Dark.” The first set of song lyrics go like this:

*Why be afraid if I'm not alone, though life is never easy the rest is unknown
Up to now for me it's been hands against stone, spent each and every moment
Searching for what to believe*

*Coming out of the dark, I finally see the light now, it's shining on me
Coming out of the dark I know the love that saved me, You're sharing with me*

I had originally planned to save this sermon introduction for the first Sunday we are back together in worship, but the Holy Spirit was working on me this week. I am not always able to claim the knowledge of the work of God’s hand in my life. Some days it is more visible than others – more apparent, more felt – if that makes sense. I had been reminded of this song weeks ago – with the plan to preach it on March 7th. It could still happen in a different way, but this past week – the Holy Spirit has been hounding me. And the words of this song, kept coming back to my mind. For me, it does feel as if we are “coming out of the dark” as the song goes. Not just because the pandemic “may” be slowly in decline – though that is my deep hope and not just because winter may or may not be preparing to transfer its power to Spring, but because through so many moments in this past year we have felt more of the oppressive shadows overwhelming the light - even as we trust the light of God is still present.

I would be lying to tell you that this experience of the oppressive darkness has not overwhelmed me at times in these past months. The beginning of the pandemic took away what I love most – the interaction with all of you. And then death took away someone I loved. And even as we figured out ways of gathering for worship – outside, inside, in the humidity and the frigid cold – worship has been different. Not hearing you sing, not seeing your reaction to a bad joke or hearing you resonate with a reflection that struck you to your core. And so this day, as Jesus stands on the mountaintop brilliantly transformed into the very light of God, “coming out of the dark” seemed to be the appropriate sentiment – for my own life, for many of yours I imagine, for our church, for our nation, and for our world.

Take a moment, to understand what life was like when Jesus steps on to the mountaintop. Follow me for a moment. The book of Mark was written sometime between 65 and 77 AD. The temple, the centerpiece of Jewish identity and religion was destroyed, and the city of Jerusalem was left in ruins. Into this time, Mark introduces the saving power of the story of Jesus to rag-tag communities of Christians struggling to survive. And if we go back to the moment of Jesus on the mountaintop today – the religious structures of the day offered oppressive rules and sacrifices for those God was supposed to be tending. The poor, the orphan, the widow, the outcast, the leper – all were dismissed as unworthy of God’s love and forgiveness. And as we enter the story of the transfiguration of Jesus today – Mark offers little in witness of God’s power – a few healings, a leper cleansed, a welcome for a sinner, the calming of a storm, a woman healed of a bleeding disorder, the raising of



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a Jairus' daughter, feeding of 5000, walking on water, feeding of 4000, healing a deaf man, and a blind man before Jesus climbs this mountain. Very few would be lucky enough to have seen even one demonstration of God's miraculous power, let alone several of the miracles of Jesus. The power of the story this day as Jesus is transformed and Moses and Elijah join him on the mountaintop is momentous. Jesus' own "coming out of the dark" experience.

Peter, James, and John are lucky enough to watch the event in real-time, in-person. They witness the transfiguration of Jesus as he is shrouded in the light of God. They saw Moses and Elijah with their own eyes. Even heard the voice of God, "this is my son, the beloved, listen to him." What I find most important in the story is not that Jesus has this experience – though I am betting he was grateful for some encouragement from ancestors who led his people before his coming. Sharing the joys and sorrows and struggles of leading a people constantly trying to decide how beneficial it was to keep following the God who delivered them from death and the grave at the hands of the Egyptians. And yet, for me, this "coming out of the darkness" story is far more about what this story means to me and my own life.

Dear friends, we have found ourselves broken, abused, defeated, depressed, cornered, conflicted, angered, discouraged, desperate, demoralized, disheartened, and frightened. We have tried our own schemes to subdue our suffering. We have sought escape with methods that cause more harm than good. We have attempted to appease the gods of this world – let Amazon deliver to you. We have found the isolation to be exactly what God told us it would be – unsettling – even for the most ardent introverts among us. Life, love, worship – were never meant to be an experience of one. In his own words, Jesus reminds us, "*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*" Yes, in all moments of life where direction is needed and where love and mercy can be shown, Jesus is present to us. A reminder that regardless of the darkness – the light of our God shines. Sharing with us the power and promise of God in the presence of our Savior, Jesus...so that we too may join our voices in the song:

*Coming out of the dark, I finally see the light now, it's shining on me
Coming out of the dark I know the love that saved me, You're sharing with me.*

Thanks be to God! Amen.