

**The Transfiguration of Our Lord (Year C)**  
**Luke 9:28-36**

**February 27, 2022**  
**Pr. Eric L. Murray**  
**St. Andrew, Franklin, TN**

Back in the early 90's, while agonizing about whether to give up my career in Physical Therapy in order to attend seminary, I kept listening over and over again to a song by the indie folk rock duo, The Indigo Girls. That song was "Watershed".

*Up on the watershed  
 Standing at the fork in the road  
 You can stand there and agonize  
 'Til your agony's your heaviest load  
 You'll never fly as the crow flies  
 Get used to a country mile  
 When you're learning to face  
 The path at your pace  
 Every choice is worth your while.<sup>1</sup>*

At that time in my life I was figuratively up on a watershed. From that point of view, I could look back from whence I had come to all the work that went into becoming a Physical Therapist, all that I might need to give up if I were to walk away from it all. But trying to look ahead was as if I were staring into a brilliant sunrise. I was blinded to the path forward. I didn't know what to do. I was *standing there, agonizing* 'Til my agony was my heaviest load. I knew, this decision would be a crucial turning point in my life.

Luke the Evangelist, introduces the opening scene in today's gospel reading, this way, according to the original Greek.

*"After these words, about eight days,  
 Jesus took with him Peter, John and James,  
 and went up on the mountain to pray."*

Now I don't know about you, but upon hearing Luke start with "after these words" made me wonder, "*what words?*" "And why would Luke start with such a reference? Is it Luke's way of subtly suggesting that these are words to which we need to be paying attention?"

---

<sup>1</sup> *Watershed*, The Indigo Girls, Nomads · Indians · Saints, 1990.

Later in the story, the voice of God will say to the disciples, *“This is my Son, my Chosen; **listen to him.**”* Listen to him.”

I think God’s “listen to him” is counsel to listen specifically to **these words**. It’s like God is underlining these words Jesus has just spoken.

and putting stars and arrows in the margins to make sure we don’t miss them. Because when Luke wrote, “After these words, the words which Jesus spoke immediately preceding...were....,

*“The Son of Man*

*must undergo great suffering, and be killed,  
and on the third day be raised.”*

[and],

*“If any want to become my followers,  
let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily  
and follow me.*

In today’s gospel reading, Jesus is there on that high mountain, up on the watershed, facing a critical turning point in his life and ministry. From up on the watershed, that high mountain, Jesus gained perspective from prayer and communion with God. From that perspective, Jesus could look back from whence he came. And with these words predicting his great suffering and death on the cross still fresh on his lips and ringing in our ears, Jesus also gained perspective on his future. His path forward from this watershed moment led to Jerusalem and to the cross, and the suffering and death it would bring. But far from dissuading him, seeing the path forward Jesus was more resolute than ever, as Luke would convey in just a few more verses writing that *Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51)*

It seems to me that our nation and world are up on a watershed of our own, facing a turning point in life on earth.

- Facing the remnant of a pandemic.
- Facing war in Eastern Europe and the recalcitrance of Russia’s President Putin.
- Facing a worsening climate crisis.
- Facing an erosion of our civility and compassion

we are standing at a watershed moment.

We can't see what the future will bring, nor the way forward. And so we stand here and agonize confused as to what choice to make.

It seems to me that the church (universal) is also standing at a crucial watershed moment. The whole of the church is looking back to its heyday, to a time when all the numbers looked great, both in membership and in finances, to a time when the church was accepted, courted even in the public square and the halls of politics. But the future is uncertain. So we stand here up on the watershed agonizing over the church, unsure of the way forward fretting over what choice to make.

It seems to me that Saint Andrew is also up on the watershed. Looking to the future, we see the challenges we face, challenges faced by most congregations these days,

- transitions in staff,
- questions about how to faithfully do ministry in this new hybrid form of church with people in-person and online,
- challenges such as a growing apathy toward what churches have traditionally offered,
- a society more entrenched in individualism and consumerism,
- and the threat of a post-pandemic mental health crisis.

This watershed moment, this turning point in our life and ministry as a congregation has us agonizing about the future. What choices do we make that will be faithful responses to the new reality we now face? Up on the watershed, as we stand here and agonize *'Til our agony's our heaviest load,*

We modern day disciples, like those first disciples up on that mountain, we need to gain the perspective of prayer and communion with God. And more than ever we need to look to our source, to Christ Jesus and **listen to him!**

When the Evangelist Luke introduced today's scene with, "After these words," it would be easy to just stop listening right there stuck in our agony over the destiny awaiting Jesus and us. But to do so would be to miss the rest of the sentence. "After these words,...about eight days," wrote Luke to

his congregation—a congregation made up of nascent Christians who would have celebrated Sunday as “**the eighth day.**” You see they believed Jesus’ resurrection on Sunday signaled that God’s new creation had begun and God’s creative activity now extended beyond the traditional seven-day week into an ongoing eighth day of God’s work. The eighth day was their way of referring to the fulfillment of Jubilee and to a new exodus, when all who are captive will be freed, to the time of the new creation and new life, and God’s promised redemption of the whole universe.

Jesus up on that watershed, looked ahead and knowing that his destiny lay in Jerusalem and the cross, would have also trusted that beyond the cross was the promise of the eighth day.

And to those first disciples, just in case they were still weighed down with sleep and to us, Jesus’ disciples today just in case we are weighed down by the heavy load of agonizing over the future, and risk missing this important point, God gives us one more epiphany:

**—Jesus transfigured—**

a sign of the eighth day, of the new life and new creation, Jesus shining like a brilliant sunrise illuminating the path forward into the future.

Yes, we still have major turning points to navigate. We still have 40 days, the ancient way of saying *however long it takes* time spent taking up our cross daily to follow Christ. We still have faithful choices worth their while.

But, all the while we face them by looking beyond the cross to what God is even now in the eighth day working to bring to completion—work we get to join God in completing as we pick up the cross, follow Christ and listen to him...until the whole world is transfigured and shining with love and grace.