

Transfiguration Sunday

Many preachers, including me, have used the Sunday of the Transfiguration to talk about how we love mountaintop experiences like the one Peter and James and John experienced on the mountain top with Jesus, but that we can't stay up on that mountain top forever: we have to come back down, like they did, to do the work of being Christians. Some compare a Cursillo weekend to a mountaintop. Other retreat experiences can feel the same. We are tempted to build dwellings there, like Peter suggested before they were overshadowed by a cloud and were seemingly scared into silence.

Transfiguration Sunday appears before Lent and is traditionally one of the three "T" Sundays that rectors try to get their deacons or assistants to preach. I called Deacon Bill on Thursday in his rehab facility and we both laughed remembering all the times he claims I "made" him preach on the Transfiguration as well as Thomas and the Trinity, the other Ts. You are stuck with me this year for the Transfiguration, but I'm actually kind of glad because it ties to other ideas I've been exploring.

Lent starts in three days. We are trying to cram as many Alleluias as possible in today because starting on Wednesday we will refrain from saying them for a season—not until Easter. Alleluia is a Latinized version of Hallelujah, a Hebrew word meaning Praise God. In Lent, we will dial back the praise a bit and instead focus on repentance, on purifying ourselves as we prepare for Easter, the resurrection, the defining event of our Christian faith.

Lent is traditionally a time of fasting, so people often give up something for the season of Lent. The past two years, however, we have already given up a lot due to the pandemic, and I've struggled to come up with a discipline that includes fasting. Two years ago, before I knew that a pandemic was about to change Lent for me, I took on something for Lent: "remembering" my death. I had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer so it seemed a potentially fruitful discipline. Christians are encouraged to keep our deaths in mind. Some saints even worked with a skull on their desk.

But then a pandemic ravaged the world, my friend Sean at a neighboring church died, and I was diagnosed with lung cancer at a far more serious stage than my breast cancer, and my Lenten discipline of contemplating my death no longer seemed fruitful. So when I've been wondering what to do for Lent this year I've wondered what the opposite of that 2020 Lenten discipline would be. Contemplating my life?

A word came to me: savor. For Lent this year, I have decided that I am going to savor everything I can. Since my recent brushes with death, I have savored small things: Eating at a restaurant outside last March for the first time in a year. Reading an essay aloud to my family outside back in Arizona in April last year. Putting together a puzzle with my three-year-old great niece. I appreciated these things more because of the pandemic as well as my own brush with death and realized that such beautiful things happen all the time, but I forget to look. To listen. To savor.

So is savoring in conflict with this story of the Transfiguration? Is Peter's desire to build three dwellings for Jesus and Moses and Elijah just him attempting to savor?

To me the key is in the word dwelling. When we dwell, we stay. When we savor, we appreciate the moment and try to squeeze every bit of meaning out of it. We delight in it. But savoring does not mean staying. Savoring is living in the moment. Ruminating, reflecting, pondering *in the moment*. Savoring, with all possible senses. Savoring might have looked like Peter and John and James seeing the glory and staring, feeling uplifted, and staying quiet, not feeling silenced.

Maybe savoring feels indulgent in a time when war is happening. I remember being in college when the Berlin Wall came down and the Cold War that had permeated my whole life until that point began to crumble as quickly as that ugly wall did. I can hardly believe the news now: certainly not something to savor, but also not something to ignore. I've watched heartbreaking footage and read difficult articles and consider it a duty not to lose sight of the war and misery and destruction and heartache.

And I still feel called to savor. Savoring life can be an act of defiance, of solidarity. Lent is a time when we become achingly aware of the fragility of life here on earth. But instead of wallowing in the heartbreak of that this year, after years in which we have lost loved ones due to COVID as well as other diseases and violence, savoring life does not seem to me to be inappropriate in the face of death. That's where I feel called to be right now and during the season of Lent.

Right now, I want to savor the waning days of Epiphany. We have today, tomorrow, and Tuesday before we remember we are dust and to dust we will return. We have three more days to savor a season of light in the darkness, and then we can savor Lent.

What can you savor today?