

**Jon Hauerwas – March 3, 2019 – “Holy”
Exodus 34: 29-35 and Luke 9:28-36**

At the zoo last summer when I would hoist little Nathan onto my shoulders, it didn't take long for most of the sensation to disappear from my left hand. My body was trying to tell me something. But like most men nursing a serious case of denial, I ignored it. In the fall, I went on to carry large rocks around my garden, rip ivy from the ground for as long as I could take it, and hack at tree stumps with an ax.

This winter, I have been on the losing end of multiple crashes on the ski slopes, and I foolishly attempted a back flip at a trampoline park. Of the latter, my eight-year old son said, “Dad, that wasn't such a smart idea. Maybe you should leave the flips to the kids.” He was right, of course. But his comment still stung.

The Bible says that there is a time for everything. And time, it seems, is catching up with me. Recently, my symptoms have worsened. Most days, my left hand is partially numb for at least part of it. As the problem persisted into the new year, I began to worry about a pinched nerve or possible nerve damage. I began naming my neck and spine trauma from year's past, and that would only seem to confirm my theory.

As a young adult, I was sitting behind the wheel of my car, fully stopped, when in the rearview mirror, I could see a vehicle approaching at a high rate of speed. And then, in the blink of an eye, my body tensed for impact as the car behind me slammed into my bumper, badly warping the frame of my car, and leaving me in pain from the whiplash. A couple of years later, I endured a second, almost identical crash.

There were other incidents, as well. Growing up, I loved to play soccer, the so called “beautiful game.” From my perspective, few things in life can compare with scoring a goal in a close match. My role was center forward. It was my job to use my feet to direct the ball into the back of the net. When I couldn’t strike it from below, I would attack it in the air. Over the years, I absorbed countless headers. The fans, my teammates, and the adrenaline coursing through my body encouraged me every step of the way. I was even rewarded, in no small part, for being a fearless practitioner of the game – earning, along the way, numerous awards as offensive MVP. But time is catching up with me.

Recently, I went to visit my physician. After asking the cursory questions and applying pressure to the affected areas, she, too, suspected my nerves. She recommended x-rays which, thankfully, showed no spacing problems or arthritis of

any significance. My next stop was to meet with a physical therapist, and I began that process earlier this week.

As many of you have told me, PT is no fun. Admittedly, my current struggles are nothing compared to rehab from knee, or hip, or shoulder surgery. But what little I have endured has given me a deeper appreciation for the limits and challenges of our earthly bodies. It's also made me more compassionate about the suffering of others.

Three days from now, when we return to this holy space on Ash Wednesday, we will hear these simple yet direct words, "Remember that you are dust, and that to dust you shall return." Such phrases are not a common part of our daily practice. Who likes to be reminded of their mortality – of our time? It makes us uncomfortable. And yet, this is precisely the work of Lent. To see our time, and all of time, in relation to God's time.¹

Soon, Jesus will be tempted. Betrayed. Handed over to his enemies. Imprisoned. Beaten. Disfigured. Crucified. These things happened not just in theory,

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time: Sermons, Prayers, and Sundries*, (Cascade Books: 2004).

but in time. Not just hypothetically, but to his actual, human body. When we say that we are hurting, he knows.

This is Transfiguration Sunday. Our gospel lesson tells us that Jesus invited three of his disciples to ascend a mountain with him. Their stated purpose was to pray. But, isn't it true that we can pray anywhere? Why did Jesus and the disciples go to this extra effort? Or to put it more bluntly in this setting: Why not just stay at home on Sunday mornings? After all, God is there too, right?

Yes. God is certainly with us wherever we may be. Even so, today's gospel lesson wants us to understand how important it is to create intentional spaces for the Divine.² Will Willimon writes that "the transfiguration is a kind of parable of us here at worship." We make the effort to gather in church, hoping to be with Jesus. "Maybe we think of him primarily as a wonderful teacher, or an inspiring moral example, or a good guide along life's way, or all the other rather mundane ways of thinking about Jesus. We come to church to get our explanations, or our rules, or our principles for life."³

² Ed. Joel B. Green, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year C, Volume 1*, (Westminster John Knox Press: 2018), 315.

³ Will Willimon, *Lectionary Sermon Resource: Year C, Part 1*, (Abingdon Press: 2018), 176.

“And that’s okay, as far as it goes. But sometimes Jesus takes it to another level. Sometimes he leads us beyond our answers and rules and certainties. It’s as if he takes our hand and leads us up into another realm. He shines before us, mysterious and wonderful, beyond our ability to explain or understand. And maybe that’s when worship, when church, when being a disciple of Jesus is as good as it gets. And we exclaim, as those first disciples exclaimed on the mountaintop, ‘Master, it’s good that we’re here.’”⁴

On that mountaintop so long ago, something happens. Jesus, the one who will soon be disfigured, is now transfigured. His clothes become a dazzling white, and a bright light shines around him. Moses and Elijah appear, two giants of the faith, and they begin speaking with Jesus about his “departure.” The Greek word for departure is *exodos*, and it carries multiple meanings.

As Diane Chen explains, *exodos* “recalls the first exodus, when God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. Second, *exodos* is a euphemism for death, anticipating the means by which the Messiah will save God’s people this time.” And third, Jesus will physically depart following his resurrection “by way of his ascension into glory. In these three meanings taken together, Jesus’

⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

‘departure’, or *exodus*, represents a salvific mission in which God’s Messiah will suffer and die before he is raised and vindicated in glory.”⁵

Before he departs, he will walk with us. He will hold our broken bodies, our shattered hopes, and our best laid plans that turned to dust. He will observe our traumas, past and present, and transform those scars into acts of compassion. He will draw near to us in the midst of temptation, share our struggles, and hear our cries. When we are tired, and weak, and in need of renewal, he will lead us to the mountaintop.

And once we are there, gathered for prayer and worship, having set aside the time, and having made an intentional space for the Divine, God will enter in. Alive. Transfigured. Renewed. And there, we will find a “a vision of assurance that will encourage us through the dark, long hours between Good Friday and Easter Sunday that lie” ahead.⁶ May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 312.