

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas - February 23, 2020 – Well Pleased  
Exodus 24:12-18 and Matthew 17:1-9**

When something is new, it feels more like a choice. A child participating in a new sport wonders if it's really for her. She won't know, we say, until she experiences it for herself. A couple out on a first date is exploring the possibility of spending more time together. What will their future hold? A young professional feels as though he is trying on a new identity in the workplace. Does this career fit? Does it make sense given who he is as a person? In time, we mature. We become comfortable and confident with who we are. Aware of our preferences, we slide into comfortable rhythms.

For many years, I wrestled with the notion of church as a part of my identity. I wasn't sure if it would become a valuable resource in my life or if I would leave it behind. Then, in college, I noticed that my interest in the church became more than a curiosity. I realized that I liked it. That I looked forward to it. For me, worship became a joyful way of being, filling not only my Sundays, but the rest of my life with meaning. Until, one day, the Christian journey seemed less like a

choice or a decision for me to make, and more like a regular affirmation of the person that I had already become.<sup>1</sup>

Mine is a curious profession. Each week, the minister stands in the pulpit, wears a robe and a stole, prays, reads from ancient scriptures and seeks to interpret them. The minister regularly confesses faith publicly. There is something about my role, with all of the time spent discerning the nature of God's will and call, that makes the whole idea of church seem far more normative to me than it actually is. In reality, the worship hour each week represents a dramatic departure for most of us. This is true even for those of us who come here regularly. What we do in church is different.

Here we seek the presence of the divine. Here we maintain that God has something to show us. Here we believe that God is still speaking and that God is calling to us in this moment. Friends, already today God has called us. Away from organizing and taxes. Away from cleaning and DIY projects. Away from attending to professional obligations, or shopping, or exercising, or enjoying just a bit more leisure time on a Sunday morning. Here we are invited to pause, to still our hearts and minds, and to wonder.

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<sup>1</sup> Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002. Page 130.

In our second lesson this morning, Jesus asks three of his disciples to go on a journey with him. Whatever intentions they may have had that day would need to be placed on hold because Jesus needs them. He has something to show them. He wants to remind them of God's purpose for their lives. So he leads them up to a high place where they can more easily receive the gift of that day.

You may already know this, but in antiquity, higher altitudes symbolized “the border zone between earth and heaven, between the material and the spiritual.”<sup>2</sup> It is no accident, then, that Jesus invites Peter, and James, and John to join him in that liminal space. Because that was the whole point of Jesus ministry – to bring near the kingdom of God on earth.

For their part, the disciples are neither passive nor naïve. They, too, recognize the significance of this location. They know that Moses received the 10 Commandments on a mountain. And they recognize that God often spoke to the prophets from on high. Something meaningful is apt to happen in this place, which means that the disciple's primary responsibility is to be attentive to whatever it is

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare, *Matthew, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James Luther Mays, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. Page 198.

that God may be saying to them at that moment. When they arrive at the destination, God wastes no time. As if on cue, Jesus is transfigured before them.

In her book, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, Dorothy Bass writes that “Time is not our enemy, nor is it a hostile place from which we must flee.” Instead, “it is a meeting place, a point of rendezvous with God.”<sup>3</sup> This means that if we are to fully receive this day and, with it, the gift of time itself, then we are wise to free ourselves from life’s many distractions in order to make the space to welcome all that God is doing in our midst.

I want to conclude today by giving you an example of this. Typically, when I pick my children up from school, I ask them, simply, “How was your day?” Two weeks ago, though, I decided to mix things up. And rather than asking, “How was your day?” I said, instead, “Where did you see God today?” And it was amazing to me that by altering that one question, it completely changed the tone of the conversation. Not only did it change the tone of the conversation, but it was memorable.

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<sup>3</sup> Bass, Dorothy C. *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2000. Page 11.

I know this was the case because when I picked my children up again the next day, I asked, as usual, “How was your day?” But Liam, my oldest, wasn’t having any of it. He said, “Don’t you mean to ask, ‘Where did you see God today?’” As my fourth grader reminded me, each day is not finally a series of events to be recited, but is a gift to be received as bountifully as grace. With this affirmation, surely God is well pleased. May it be so and all thanks be to God.

Amen.