



Transfiguration of the Lord  
Sunday, February 14, 2021

## **The End Is Where We Start From**

The Reverend Dr. John A. Dalles

*2 Kings 2:21; Psalm 50:1-6; and Mark 9:2-9*

Transfiguration Sunday is a day when we reflect upon the interconnection between the here and now, and the hereafter — the meeting of the present moment with eternity. Up there on that mountain, Jesus showed His disciples that the two do intertwine and connect — not *how*, but that they do.

For there they were: the people of the present moment, and yet there were also those other people, Moses and Elijah, who were people of the past, yet, somehow, in the present moment, as well.

Time, it seems, is fluid and flexible with God. This reality breaks into our awareness only if and when God chooses for that to happen. And it has a larger purpose than simply making us gaze in wonderment.

**Time is fluid and flexible with God.** We live in the present moment, yet God is able to link today with tomorrow and with yesterday. Each one of them can inform the other. Each one is enriched by the other. Each is so intimately connected to the other that they are only complete when we see the whole picture.

If you are of a certain generation, you will remember a television series about historic events. A line from that series sums it up: *"You Are There,"* hosted by Walter Cronkite. Cronkite summarized what happened when each segment concluded. He reminded viewers, *"What sort of day was it? A day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our times ... all things are as they were then, and you were there."*

Historic moments of great importance. Instead of being outside onlookers, we are invited to experience these momentous doings, as if they were happening to us.

So instead of looking back to remember that point in 2 Kings when Elijah was carried into heaven, we become as Elisha, witnesses to this miracle.

We say with Elisha: *"My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!"* We see Elijah no more. We take hold of our garments, and rip them in two. We live it.

"How is that possible?" we may ask. "With God all things are possible," is the faithful answer. With God, we can be at the end of things, and the beginning of things, at one and the same time — which is what T. S. Eliot says: *"What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from."*

**The end is where we start from.**

You know that to be true. If you have held a newborn infant in your arms, even in that moment, as you see that new person fresh from God, you also wonder:

- "Who will they become?"
- "What will they do?"
- "What will they see?"

Those distant realities are not in the present moment. Or are they? With God, they are always there.

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It is somewhat like being an interim minister. Even from the first Sunday, both that minister and that congregation are aware that there will be a **last Sunday**.

So even in the joy of welcome, we wonder:

- “What will happen between now and then?”
- “How will we be different by then?”
- “What will we share together?”
- “How will it inform our faith?”
- “How will it help us live into what God has planned for us in the future?”

Those far-off realities are not in the present moment. Or are they? With God, they are always there. Over time, they become known to us, so that, now, we can look back on the past two years and fill in the questions with answers.

And so it is, when we are with someone who has had a wealth of years from that day when — as a newborn — they were held lovingly in a parent’s arms. The questions the parent wondered about then have been answered over the decades — perhaps, long after that parent was no longer there to witness them. Those far-off realities are not in the present moment. Or are they? With God, they are always there.

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This reality breaks into our awareness only if and when God chooses for that to happen. And it has a larger purpose than simply making us gaze in wonderment.

It was a robe-rending moment for Elisha when Elijah — his friend, mentor, and leader — left him. It was a life-transfiguring event when Elijah and Moses disappeared, and the disciples were left standing there with Jesus — awestruck.

The most natural thing for Elisha, for the disciples, and for us, is to say, *“Saying goodbye is very hard.”*

It is. We want to hold on to what has been. We are not ready to let go.

We want to build a little shelter of some kind, there on the mountain, so we can stay there from then on, and always have some last lingering pieces of what once was. That is what the disciples proposed. As Matthew records this same moment, Peter says: *“Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three booths: One for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”*

I have looked, and I do not see Jesus saying, *“Great, fellows, build those little booths. Stay in this moment forever.”*

The wisdom of the Lord prevails in this and in all things.

Jesus knows that, as comforting as it may be, it will not be good for us in the long run to try to enshrine a moment, or a year, or a lifetime. The fact is, time marches on. We grow; we change — often for the better. But even when we are sadder but wiser, that, too, is part of God’s plan.

So God’s Word to Elisha, and to Peter and James and John, and to you and me, echoes these humble words spoken by a little stuffed bear named Winnie-the-Pooh: *“How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.”* (A. A. Milne)

A Christian might modify it slightly and say: *“How richly blessed I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.”*

Or, as Richard Bach says: *“Don’t be dismayed at goodbyes. A farewell is necessary before you can meet again. And meeting again, after moments or lifetimes, is certain for those who are friends.”*

To which we would add: *“... and is certain for all who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

As God declares in this morning’s Psalm: *“Gather to Me this consecrated people.”*

*“This consecrated people”* means you, and me, and all who have entrusted their lives to the Living Lord, from every time and place, world without end.

So, on this Transfiguration Sunday, which also this year happens to be Valentine's Day — a day devoted to the people we love — and is also the last Sunday that I will be here as your Interim Senior Minister, please think like this:

**The end is where we start from.**

- How lucky I am.
- Smile because it happened.
- This is not a goodbye, this is a thank you.
- Meeting again is certain.

*"There are no goodbyes for us. Wherever you are, you will always be in my heart."* (Mahatma Gandhi)

*"Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened."* (Dr. Seuss)

*"What sort of day was it? A day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our times ... all things are as they were then, and you were there."*

Amen.