

## “God Finds Purpose in Christ”

Preached March 2, 2014 at Trinity Lutheran Church

Focus Texts: Matthew 17:1-9 and Exodus 24:12-18

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When I was in college, I took a psychology course on fulfillment, purpose, and meaning. I believe the course was called “Positive Psychology,” probably because for much of us, when we think of psychology, we often times think of it in the negative, focusing on disorders and struggles. But in this course, we specifically focused on how our minds make life meaningful and positive. In the course, we read a book called “Finding Flow” by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. In the book, he writes about the psychology of engagement with everyday life. His focus is those times, when we find engagement, meaning, and purpose in what we are doing, that life just seems to flow. It’s when we walk that fine line between anxiety and boredom, and find ourselves excitingly engaged. Admittedly, this idea of flow is not always easy for us to find, but when we do, time flies by, so purposeful do we find the tasks at hand.

When I think of finding flow, I think of new parents and how they sometimes speak with wonder about what it was like to look at their child for the first time: that moment when they first held their newborn or saw their adopted child and had the sudden realization that in the face looking back at them was their destiny, and that from that moment on, their lives were going to be linked forever. I also think of couples talking about when they realized that the person sitting across the table was the person they wanted to spend the rest of their life with. And I think of those people who describe showing up at work and it doesn't feel like work anymore because their passion and vocation have become one.

These moments are powerful. The moments when our minds say "This is it. This is what it's all about. *This* is where I'm supposed to be." The moment when you have found your flow.

Today before we head into the wilderness of the season of Lent, we celebrate the Transfiguration. Transfiguration is a fancy word for Jesus being transformed. I think maybe this story of Jesus up on the mountain is about Jesus finding his flow. That Jesus’ purpose is becoming clear. That this is what it is all about, where Jesus is supposed to be, this is why God became flesh in the first place.

So what happens, exactly? How does God’s purpose in Christ become clear? Matthew tells us of a supernatural moment in which Jesus’s glory is shown, and revealed what God was up to with him. And this moment happens on a mountain, like many God moments do.

James, John and Peter are there and get to witness it. It doesn’t say why they are the lucky ones, but perhaps this hike started like any others with Jesus. Perhaps they thought they were going to just get some special teaching apart from the others or simply have a bit of time to pray. When all of the sudden, Jesus, the rabbi normally in dirty robes and dusty sandals, it was like he had been dipped in Clorox and rolled in a snowy field on a sunny day, so bright and shiny he became. And then, there is Moses and Elijah, two heavyweights from the history of the Jewish people! And there’s a cloud—full of energy—and then the voice. The voice, the echoes out: “This is my son. The beloved. Listen to him.” I imagine their jaws drop. They were terrified the text says. Frozen in place...And just as quickly as this moment had come, and before terrified

Peter could set up camp, or get out his smart phone and instagram this moment for all time—the cloud disappears and the encounter is over. And Jesus is back to dirty and dusty, and wants them to go back down the mountain, with a warning not to tell anyone what they had seen or heard. I imagine them shaking their heads, looking at one another. Thinking the same thing—the other guys are never going to believe this.

These moments, where the reality of God is suddenly revealed more powerfully than normal, we all know on some level or another, don't we? Kind of like finding your spiritual flow. They are the mountaintop experiences of faith. The moments where your skin gets goosebumps. Or a lump forms in your throat. Or even a tear comes to your eye, because for just a second, it is as if the holy has brushed past you, and you know, for that moment, the presence and reality and the power of God. In that moment, your grasp of God is different. Maybe it's at a wedding, or a baptism. Maybe at the bedside of a dying loved one. Maybe when you realize or learn something new about life and faith that changes everything. Maybe watching a sunrise over a frozen lake. Maybe when everything falls into place that had so stressed you out. If you tried to describe these experiences to others, they might just look at you funny and ask what was the big deal? How do you describe how you know God is present in that moment, in that instant? They are the moments when you say, "Holy Cow... God is really, real."

It would be nice to stay in such moment, to stay in that feeling. To be so certain. To be so sure of God's presence. It's not hard to understand Peter's inclination to want to set up camp and dwell in this place where the cloud is bright, the saints are there, and the actual voice of God is speaking words of love and direction in your ears.

But, the point of God in Jesus is not to stay up on a mountain, far away from the ones God loves. On this transfiguration Sunday, as much as we marvel at the brilliance and glory of our beautiful savior, we are reminded that what makes him truly our savior is that he doesn't stay up on that mountain top looking like a bleached angel—Christ comes down the mountain. Down. Down into everyday life. Down into the nitty-gritty details of misunderstanding, squabbling, disbelieving disciples. Down into the religious and political fights of the day. Down into the jealousies and rivalries both petty and gigantic that color our relationships. Down into the poverty and pain that are part of our life in this world. Down. Jesus came down, with a purpose, to bring God's love into the life of the world. A purpose and love that would ultimately lead him to the cross. Jesus came down to bring God's love to the cross.

Why? Because that's where we live. Down the mountain in the valleys. In the midst of death and sin. God, who shined so gloriously in Jesus on that mountaintop, comes down. Day by day. Through the wilderness of our lives. Even and especially when the times get hard. Even when the experience of something divine seems so far away. When, instead of purpose and fulfillment, our lives are more about pain, and struggle, and doubt. And it is in these times we hear the voice come out of the cloud, this is my son, the beloved. Listen to him. In Christ, we see God, and we see God's love for us. In Christ, God's purpose to love and redeem this world becomes clear.

On this final Sunday of the Epiphany season, after we have seen sign after sign, miracle after miracle, teaching after teaching from Jesus, our image of Jesus clears up on the mountain. As Jesus becomes transfigured, Jesus finds his flow. His purpose. Jesus Christ came so that we might know God in a way unimaginable before. In Jesus Christ, we experience God's

compassion, God's healing, God's forgiveness, and God's radical welcome. Today, on the mountaintop, Jesus' power and glory are revealed. Power and glory that does not stay up on the mountain, but enters into our lives through the Christ.