

Rev. Sharon Smith
August 4th, 2018
Transfiguration Sunday
Luke 9: 28-36

Objectives:

- To open up our awareness of Luke's Jewish imagination,
 - To ponder what evokes the memories of our spiritual identity,
 - To acknowledge the limits of the past and the value of memories of Jesus that disrupt our present and lead us forward, and
 - To invite us to listen beyond that which we expect into the 8th day of the unexpected.
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Introduction:

Remember to Remember.

The indigenous people of the America's (or Turtle Island), have a particular affection for sweetgrass.

It is sacred.

In their tradition it was the very first plant to grow on Mother earth and its fragrance is a sweet memory.

One woman writes: "Breathe in its scent and you start to remember things you didn't know you'd forgotten"

The scent of Sweetgrass evokes sacred stories.

Stories about human origins, reordering what is important in life, what needs to be valued.

Remembering.

I wonder how we remember to remember.

Is it times of silence where we close our eyes and listen to our heart beats.

Is it the beauty of creation – a sunset, the call of a bird.

Is it a particular song?

Is it the taste of bread and the smell of wine?

Is it the sound of a familiar prayer said in unison?

The things that call us to remember... like sweetgrass...

Gathers together ideas and our stories of what is important in life.

The first disciples climbed a mountain with Jesus, and they remembered.

Peter, James and John were rooted in the stories of Torah (the Jewish scriptures),

And climbing a mountain evoked memory. It was like sweetgrass.

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Australian professor Rikk Watts spent his career researching the ways that New Testament writers brought merged their Jewish stories with their memories of Jesus.

And Luke chapter 9 is a great example.

Jesus had just rocked their world.

He delivered the shocking news that he was about to be rejected and suffer death at the hands of the authorities.

The disciples had expected a messiah, a saviour, a Moses, an Elijah... not a rejected, suffering leader.

And so... Jesus takes them up a mountain.

A mountain. A mountain.

Alright is just me. Or are mountains not one of the most evocative places?

(Romantic, sunsets, a sense of victory...)

Now add a layer of Jewish identity.

And you would remember:

- (1) "Abraham! Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the **Mountain of Moriah**, and offer him there as a burnt offering."

A controversial difficult moment in history.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God..."

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram and he took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place

"The Lord will provide"

Memories of the Mountain of Moriah.

Now remember the Exodus:

- (2) As the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. There Israel camped in front of the mountain. ³ Then Moses went up **Mount Sinai** to God;."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after."

Later, when ²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai... the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.

Memories of the Mountain of Sinai.

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Later in the era of the Kings...

(3) You will remember the prophet Elijah on the **Mountain of Horeb**.

“Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, he was told, for the Lord is about to pass by.”

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind;
and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake;¹²
and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire;
and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice in a whisper, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Memories of the Mountain of Horeb.

Jesus stands with James, Peter and John on a Mountain.

It floods them with memories:

- Mount Moriah: The Lord shall provide like he did for Abraham and Sarah
- Mount Sinai: I will come in a cloud, trust the one whose face shines like Moses
- Mount Horeb: Listen to me when I call, just like he whispered to Elijah.

And the disciples respond by offering to build three dwellings or booths.

A ritual they did every year to remember the Exodus and wilderness time.

The memory and ritual is so powerful that Luke uses the Greek word for “Exodus”.

Here translated departure.

Oh how those first disciples longed for a new Exodus.

For the pain and trauma in a Roman Palestine to be over. They were waiting for their rescue.

And hoping against all hopes, that Jesus would be their new Moses, their Elijah.

And so, the Mountain was like sweetgrass.

They remembered things they didn't know they'd forgotten.

It became a way for them to remember to remember.

John O Donohue writes in his well-known book, *Anam Cara*, that memory is one of the most beautiful realities of the soul.

He says that the computer industry has ‘hacked’ the notion of memory.

To say that computers have memory is false. A computer has storage and recall.

Humans have memory – it is refined, sacred and personal.

It has its own selectivity and depth, feeling and sensibility.

Our memory serves us well.

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We relish it, we are comforted by it.
We share our memories with others.

And we are transformed by it.

The way things have been in the past, are often transferred onto the future:
Our memories often determine the way we think things ought to be.

But Memory, especially the memory of Jesus is transformative.

Jesus said to his disciples... I am not who you expect me to be.
I am going to be rejected and die.

But their memories clouded their ability to take this in.
They wanted a Moses, they wanted an Elijah.
The mountain evoked these memories.

Yet a voice broke through that urges them to listen, to really listen to what Jesus is saying.

And Jesus repeats his words:

“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.” I am not Moses, I am not Elijah.

Theologian John Caputo writes that...

The first disciples were expecting one event, an event to end all events, but they got another. Which really was a disappointment.

He goes on to say that...

Jesus is too often a mirror in which we behold our own image.

The things we remember.

The victories, the honour, the successes, the times when ‘everybody is a Christian’...

John Caputo reminds us that just like Jesus disrupted the pattern in Israel’s constructed history...

So it is for the church.

The structure of church is a provisional structure in the history of Christianity.

Whatever has taken place in the form of church... Christ can disrupt.

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This is the dangerous memory of Jesus.
A Jesus that disrupts. A Jesus that will surprise us with another way.

Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber is a six feet tall woman with spiky hair and a body covered in tattoos. She is a Lutheran pastor and founded a church called the House for All Sinners and Saints. Together this community is reimagining Christianity.

Nadia remembers a time when the church was all mostly young adults, and it was as she describes - hip, urban young adults. Just the way she had imagined it to be. And then the *The Denver Post* ran an article on the church. And the next week the service had doubled in size with curious Lutherans.

And they were excited because they were really struggling to grow, but what happened was the church began to fill with all the wrong kind of people - the wrong kind of different. So instead of the usual neighborhood drag queens, bankers started to show up. And Nadia in a very honest interview, says she just freaked out!

So.. they had a sharing circle to see how the members felt about the growth: One person said: "Look, as the young transgender kid who was welcomed into this community, I just want to go on the record as saying I'm glad there's people who look like my mom and dad here, because they love me in a way my mom and dad can't."

**This is the dangerous memory of Jesus.
A Jesus that disrupts our original plans.
A Jesus that will surprise us with another way.**

Remember... let us remember the journey we have been on to get here.
And let us listen to the Spirit.

**The Spirit of Christ who disrupts our original plans.
and will surprise us with another way.**

Luke says that all this happened on the 8th day...

- A day beyond the limits of the cycle of creation
- A day beyond Sabbath rest
- A day of resurrection
- A day of the unexpected
- A day of surprises and new things.

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And each week we gather, according to the Eastern Orthodox tradition on the 8th day.

We gather together.

We taste the bread and the wine of the Kingdom of God.

We remember to remember.

And we wait for Christ's disruptive surprises, of things yet to be revealed.

Amen