



*Living Memorials*

A sermon for Transfiguration Sunday

Matthew 17: 1-9

February 26 2017

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

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Text: *This is my beloved Son... listen to him.*

Have you ever noticed the little teddy bear zip tied to the sign in the median near the corner of War Memorial Drive and Sheridan Road? From my understanding it was placed there in memory of a young handicapped man who was killed while crossing War Memorial Drive many years ago. It is replaced many times during the course of a year as the ravages of central Illinois weather takes its toll. Sometimes it wears a Santa suit, but more often than not, it is just an inexpensive teddy bear. It is a memorial to a person and an event.

In our gospel lesson Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, to the mountaintop with him, and there they beheld Jesus' "transfiguration." Before their very eyes His faith shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. (v.2) Moses and Elijah stood with him; Moses, the great lawgiver who once asked God if he could behold the Almighty's glory. And Elijah, the one who was supposed to return to usher in the arrival of the longed for Messiah.

Seeing this mystical experience Peter said to Jesus that it was good that the disciples were there to see this mystical vision. He wanted to build three booths or monuments to mark the occasion. No sooner were the words out of his mouth but a bright cloud enveloped them and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love...listen to him." The three fell to the ground and covered their faces so overcome were they by awe and fear. Jesus came and touched them saying, "Get up; do not be afraid."

Peter had said nothing wrong. He did what one was supposed to do to mark a holy event and a holy site. You may recall the story of Jacob. As he fled the wrath of his brother Esau and lay down one night and slept. As he slept he had a dream. In that dream a ladder descended from heaven and angels went up and down the ladder. In the dream the promise that was first given to Abraham and reaffirmed in the life of Jacob. He would carry on the Promise. When he awoke he took three stones and made an altar, a monument, a memorial marking the spot naming it Bethel, literally, "the house of God."

So Peter recognized that this was a time and a place where heaven and earth, the eternal and temporal touched. It was a holy place, and he wanted to mark it. But that was not what Jesus' ministry was about, and it was not God's intention. You see, God does not want dead memorials or monuments to sometime long ago. God wants "living memorials." As the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "Do you not know that your body of the temple of the Holy Spirit?" God wants you and I to be living memorials, listening to Jesus and taking Jesus seriously.

Over the past few weeks we have been focused on the Sermon on the Mount. As the crowd gathered Jesus pulled his disciples aside, in Matthew's gospel, and reminded them *who* they were—salt and light. He told them how to live together in community and how they were to present themselves in the world as they go about their ministry. They were to be different—a peculiar people. They were to be living memorials, monuments to the love of God. They were to be salt that preserves that which is good in this world. They are to be light providing hope in a world of darkness. They are to forgive and freely as they have been forgiven. They were to walk the second mile, turn the other cheek and be reflections of the eternal God who causes the rain to fall upon both the just and the unjust.

As we enter into the season of Lent, a time for reflection as we prepare for the celebration of the event that lies at the very heart of our faith—Easter, the resurrection of our Lord, we, too are called to be living memorials. We too are to be a pinch of salt that preserves and brings out of flavor of God's goodness. We, too, are to be little beacons of light that give hope to the darkest places of our community and the world. We, too are to take Jesus seriously. And we do these things not out of fear but out of a sense of gratitude. We do these things not so that others will speak highly of us or so that we can get an award or so that they will think highly of First Federated Church. We do them in order to glorify God and to enjoy God forever.

To God be the glory. Amen.