

Sermon 2007 Transfiguration

Text: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Theme: "Four Oswego Teens, Anna Nicole and Moses"

The media has been all abuzz about death this past week. Every time we opened a newspaper, turned on the TV or radio or opened our browsers, we saw all the news about the teenagers in Oswego who died in a car wreck or the suppositions about what really killed Anna Nicole Smith. We tend to be fascinated with death.

I field dozens of questions all the time about the afterlife. Do the dead know what is going on here? When people die quickly or violently, do they always know that they're dead? Can the dead come back and communicate with us? Do the dead haunt people or places? And all of those questions and many more come from a complete misunderstanding of what death is and what life is.

Death and life are not so different really. In the summer of 1967 my family took a road trip from Seattle to North Carolina. This was the first time I had ever been out of the state of Washington and as we approached the Idaho state line, my excitement grew and grew. What would Idaho be like? It was a

whole new state...a whole new world right? I waited and waited and waited and finally I saw the sign, "Welcome to Idaho!" I waited some more and finally asked, "when are we going to be in Idaho?" My mother said that we had been in Idaho for the last 10 miles. What a huge disappointment! No fanfare! No wall, or fence not even a line. No big gate to pass through and not even a scenery change. Southern Idaho was just exactly like Eastern Washington!

Notice the lack of fanfare at Moses' death. No big funeral. No last amazing revelations. He and God walk up Mt. Nebo and God shows Moses the Promised Land. Moses is not the one to complete the journey. That would be Joshua. But when it comes time for Moses to leave his body until the day of the resurrection God is with him and it just happens. In fact, it is so downplayed that all were told is that he died there with God and God buried his body somewhere and no one knows where.

This is how one who knows God dies. There comes a moment when we are surrounded by the holy angels, our soul leaves our body and our body collapses. That's it. Whether we

die old and weak in a hospital bed or vigorous and strong like Moses, this is the way death comes for one who knows God.

The qualifier is "one who knows God." We are told that God knew Moses face to face. That phrase is not speaking of recognition. Of course God recognized him – God created him! This phrase speaks of depth, love, connection. If you think of the person who is your closest friend, the person in whom you can confide anything, the person who you can call at 4:00 am and they won't be mad, then multiply it by a 1,000 and you have what the phrase "knew face to face" means.

You and I know God like this. It is not because of what we have studied. It is not because of the sermons we have heard. It is not even because of personal experiences we have had with God or his angels. It is because of Jesus Christ. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus disciples got to see that there is not a great void between death and life but in fact a thin, almost imperceptible line. There stood Moses and Elijah with Jesus and they understood that death was just a phase of eternal life for those who know God. Moses and Elijah who had been gone from

this earth for hundreds of years, stood with Jesus in living color. At that moment they saw that for which they had only hoped before. They knew that they were connected to the very one who held death and life and eternal life in the palm of his hand and they had absolutely nothing to fear. That is why they could move forward from that moment and walk through fire to accomplish the goal their Lord had laid before them.

Just before we enter the dark valley of Lent, we pause for a moment on the Mount of Transfiguration to take a deep breath. We pause with Jesus, Elijah, Moses, Peter, James and John and we remember that when we descend into the valley it is in the certainty that we will rise on the other side. God used Baptism to wash us clean and connect us to Jesus. He reached into the world and made us Jesus' brothers and sisters so that whatever he gets – we get because we know God.

See death is not such a mystery. It is simply a small step along the way to the resurrection and paradise. For those whom God does not know, we can say very little...the Bible is silent

other than the situation is certainly not pleasant. For those who do know God it is as simple as stepping through a doorway.

Knowing this means that we can let go of all of our angst over our own lives. Will we succeed in our career? Will we make a good grade on our math test? Will our relationships succeed? All of our mistakes are forgiven. All of our failures are forgotten. You and I already walk with Jesus and God sees us through him. We can stop worrying about ourselves and begin to focus our concern on those who do not have this relationship with God.

Knowing God face to face takes all the mystery out of death and we know that death will be like life, only without the sin. And the resurrection of the dead will be more than everything we dreamed of, but there are many who walk in darkness, sorrow, loneliness and pain. Find them. Draw them up to stand with us on the Mount of Transfiguration and so set them free as you have been set free. AMEN.