

Transfiguration—February 11, 2024

Text: Mark 9:2-9

Theme: How I Want to Go

**Today we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord. Transfiguration is always the last Sunday after Epiphany and the Sunday immediately preceding Ash Wednesday. It's called transfiguration because Jesus allowed His divinity to transfigure, that is to shine through His humanity for just a moment. Jesus took his three closest disciples to the top of a mountain and allowed them to get a glimpse of who He was as the Son of God. We don't know which mountain it was precisely, maybe Mt. Tabor or Mt. Hermon, but it doesn't really matter. Jesus was preparing the disciples for His earthly departure early on in His ministry. He wanted them to understand and believe that he was far beyond any normal Rabbi that they had known before. Jesus is the very Son of God.**

**It is interesting that the two people He chose to appear with Him on the mountain in front of Peter, James and John were Moses and Elijah. Moses was the Lawgiver. His ministry on this earth summed up all of God's Law to His people, summarized by the 10 Commandments. Elijah was the greatest of the Prophets. He became the symbol for the prophetic office of teaching and preaching God's Word to His people. So, between Moses and Elijah, the whole Old Testament was represented. But beyond their ministry on this earth, they also had strange deaths in common. Moses was buried by God and no one knows where God buried him. We're told in Deuteronomy 34,**

**"And the LORD said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with**

**your eyes, but you shall not go over there.’ So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day.”**

**Elijah was transliterated directly into heaven on a fiery chariot. That’s the one I like. In 2 Kings 2, we read,**

**“And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, ‘My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’ And he saw him no more.” How amazing is that? God literally sent a chariot of fire for Elijah and took him directly into Heaven without having to cross through the portal of death.**

**Do you ever think about the way you want to die? I do and I figure that I might as well tell God how I want it to happen. He might not do it, but you never know, sometimes we get what we ask for! I don’t want to go quietly in my sleep or slowly in a hospital bed. I want to go like Elijah. He and his protégé were walking along, doing what prophets do when fiery horses and chariots descended from the skies to pick up Elijah and take him to heaven. That’s how I want to go – preferably on a Sunday morning and right after I have finished the sermon at the 10:30 service! Hey! It can’t hurt to ask.**

**What were those fiery horses and chariots? Many people believe that they were cherubim. Cherubim are not the naked angels in diapers shooting**

arrows into your heart on Valentines Day. Some card manufacturer no doubt created those little idiots. God created cherubim, frightening, awe-inspiring beings that are sometimes described as resembling animals. They have wings with eyes on their wings. They are a type of angel. Many theologians believe that the four living creatures surrounding the throne of God in Revelation were cherubim. There is nothing cute about a cherub. They are awe inspiring, full of the might and splendor of God.

So, Elijah is taken into heaven by some kind of amazing apparition that resembled fiery chariots and horses and we hear nothing more of him until the day of Transfiguration several hundred years later. Jesus took his disciples up on a mountain top to give them a peek behind the mask. They could not stand seeing Jesus in all his glory but they needed to at least get a glimpse of who he really was. Peter had confessed his faith that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living Lord and now he was about to see a brief flash of what that meant.

They all knew of Moses and Elijah was supposed to herald the return of the Christ. Well, here he was in all his glory. How did they know it was Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus? They did not have TikTok or Instagram. I don't know how they knew, but Mark records that that they knew. What's more, they were not frightened but suddenly felt such peace and such belonging that Peter wanted to build tents and stay forever. This was perfect. He would just build three tiny houses and they could all live up there forever!

That's the heart of how I want to go. Elijah was not afraid when the mighty cherubim descended for him. He stepped into their fiery chariot as

**though he had been riding cherubim his whole life. Peter did not quake in terror at the appearance of Jesus in a blinding white light speaking with heroes of the faith who had died centuries before. He was at home like they came over for a barbecue every Sunday afternoon. When you walk closely with Jesus, that's how you go. People who die with a powerful faith just step over and begin the next phase of existence with their lord who has loved them their whole lives. That's how I want to go too...but, you have to admit, fiery chariots would still be pretty cool.**