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Emanuel's Lutheran Church, Bellevue, PA  
February 14, 2010 • Transfiguration Sunday C  
Luke 9:28-36

This week, I have been feeling tired of winter. Ready for it to go – even though Punxsutawny Phil says that it will last into March. My back is tired from digging out my car. My brain is tired of strategizing about where to park. My extraverted self is tired of being cooped up at home.

It was the perfect time for there to be something wonderful like the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympics. I confess that up until recently, I did not remember that this would a year for the winter Olympics – so it felt like a well-timed surprise.

Did y'all watch part of them on Friday? It's so much fun to see the spectacular lights and colors. The people gathered from all over the world. The smiling and dancing and celebrating. It gave a jolt of energy. Wonder and inspiration, which only 30-40 million dollars could buy. I don't know that I have ever listened carefully to the opening remarks, but I did this weekend. John Furlong, the head of the Vancouver Olympic committee, talked about the magic of the Olympic Games. Magic that reaches all people. Which calls out our best. Magic that invites us to

dream and dream big.<sup>1</sup> It's a time of both achievement and inspiration for individuals, and nations, and our whole world. Perhaps that's most powerful for nations who have been going through hard times – For whom it's especially wonderful to rally around their athletes. It would be similar for New Orleans celebrating the Super Bowl win of the Saints.

Our gospel lesson probably seemed like a moment of magic to the disciples who were with Jesus. Maybe magic isn't the best word. It wasn't only a moment of inspiration, like the Opening Ceremonies. It was as if a window opened to heaven. It was clear that real revelation came from God. Like for Moses and Elijah, but in a new way.

God shone and spoke at just the right time for the disciples. The teachings of Jesus had been a bit confusing and startling lately. Eight days ago, Peter confessed Jesus' identity as "The Messiah of God." (Lk 9:20) He finally got the answer right! Yet Jesus responded in an unexpected way. "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (9:22) This is the first time in Luke that Jesus says

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<sup>1</sup> *"As the Olympic Cauldron is lit – the unique magic of the Olympic Games will be released upon us. Magic so rare that it cannot be controlled by borders – The kind of magic that invades the human heart touching people of all cultures and beliefs – Magic that calls for the best that human beings have to offer – Magic that causes the athletes of the world to soar -- and the rest of us to dream. Tonight – here - in the glow and wonder of the Flame -- we can all aspire to be Olympian..."* (John Furlong, Winter Olympic Games, Opening Remarks, 12 February 2010)

anything to the disciples about his passion, death, and resurrection. He continued by telling them that being a disciple means denying yourself, and taking up your cross. “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” (9:23-4)

This is not what the disciples expected. They had been listening to Jesus’ odd parables and stories. They had witnessed healings and forgiveness of sins. They saw miracles: Jesus stilled a raging storm on the sea; Jesus fed thousands of people. It all seemed so positive, like such good news for the world. What an honor to be among Jesus’ disciples! And then he pops out with this off-the-wall stuff about suffering and death. Where did this warning come from? Perhaps Jesus is not the person that they thought he was. The Messiah would be powerful. He would not suffer or be executed. He would conquer their Roman oppressors! The disciples must have been confused by it all.

In their uncertainty and confusion, God brings clarity. He makes it clear to Peter and James and John who Jesus is. He is the one who takes his place alongside the law and the prophets, represented by Moses and Elijah. The Old Testament scriptures also say that Moses and Elijah will appear when the messianic age is coming<sup>2</sup>. So Jesus is the one who is a sign of God’s kingdom coming in fullness. They receive a glimpse of the divinity of Christ. His face has been changed and his

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<sup>2</sup> *Deuteronomy 18:15* (Moses). *Malachi 4:5* (Elijah).

clothes are a dazzling white. As often happens, they start to “get” that Jesus is more than just their teacher. More than just a political figure. More than a miracle worker.

It is magical – and Peter wants to hold on to the moment. “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (9:33) Hold onto the clarity of a glorious Jesus. Dwell in the peace that passes understanding. Remain in an uncomplicated idea of the life of faith. Worship and forget what he said would come.

That’s not the way it goes though. God the Father speaks: “This is my Son, my Chosen” – which is very similar to what God said at Jesus’ baptism. But God ended with a special command: “Listen to him!” (9:35)

Listen to what Jesus says will happen.

Listen to how he describes the life of a disciple.

Listen to the love of God, who stands before you.

Listen.

Today we join Peter and James and John. We hear Luke’s tale of what they saw. We celebrate in the glory and promise that surrounds Jesus Christ. He is the chosen one. Whose birth was announced by angels. At whose baptism God spoke.

We delight in God’s revelation of Jesus on the mountain top. Perhaps some of us can connect with the awe of that kind of spiritual experience. Some speak of

intense times of life, like at births or deaths, in this way. Like the disciples, it's easy for us to hold on tightly to those moments. Times when we can see or touch God's presence in extra special ways.

Like the disciples, we are reminded that it's not about the magic – or spiritual power – of the moment. This Jesus, the Christ, is God's Son – the chosen one. This Jesus is God's Word, in bodily form. This Jesus brings us God's love that showers upon us at baptism. Surrounds us with the Spirit for our days on earth, and our days in heaven.

This Jesus takes us on a journey to fullness of life – But on a surprising path that shakes our and the disciples' expectations. Life that is real and human and vulnerable. Life with hardship and sacrifice that leads to freedom. Life that knows – and feels – pain and sorrow. Powerful life that shatters death.

This is the magical and wonderful Christ who we see and celebrate today.

Amen.