

“Where Are We Headed?”  
February 27, 2022

Exodus 34:29-35  
Luke 9:28-36

“Where are we headed?” I came up with that title a while ago—and it meant something different to me when I did than it does now. Now there is an even greater urgency to that question.

Where are we headed?

The quick answer, of course, is that no one knows. No one ever knows.

The longer answer begins with “It depends.” It depends on whether we’re talking about a two-year-old global pandemic or a three-day-old invasion of Ukraine or the stock market or our congregation or our individual lives or the lives of those whom we love.

I’ve preached throughout this pandemic. I’ve preached throughout the wars of the past 35 years. I’ve preached through bear markets and bull markets, through all the ups and downs of living in our times.

And I’ve been very reluctant to say just where it is we are heading because, well, because, really, no one—*no one*—knows.

In all of this uncertainty, in the midst of the growing fear and anger, the scripture lessons show us two things:

The fiery presence of God on Mt. Sinai,  
the light coming from Jesus.

On first sight, neither of those visions has much to do with our lives and our concerns today.

Martin Noth, one of the great Old Testament scholars in Germany in the middle of the twentieth century, wrote of the account of Moses that we heard this morning: “This story is hard to assess.”

And Fred Craddock, a widely respected preacher and teacher of preachers, said of the story from the Gospel of Luke: “There’s not much here that relates to our world.”

Just when we might need some assurance, some shoring up, we encounter the even greater unknown.

And yet, through the unknown, the unfamiliar, and the uncertain we actually do get some sense of where we are heading.

We receive our first clue in those opening words: “Now about eight days after these sayings...”

That could simply be a way of saying that about a week had gone by. But for early Christians, the “eighth day” was a way of speaking about the resurrection.

The early Christians—faithful Jews through and through—continued to treasure the Sabbath commandment, along with the rest of the *Torah*. The seventh day was the day that God, seeing that all created things were good, rested. And the Jewish people did so as well.

In time, however, as Gentile Christianity became the norm, Christians came to believe that the meaning of the Sabbath had changed with the *new creation* that God began with Christ’s death and resurrection. The holy day became not the seventh but the *eighth day*, the day on which the future burst into the present. Each Sunday became a small celebration of Easter.<sup>1</sup>

With this story, then, Luke might be speaking of the resurrection. With this story Luke takes us beyond what is familiar, what is known and tells us that God’s future is still bursting into our present.

As in the story from Exodus, heaven and earth meet. We are taken to a place that is both beyond our understanding of reality and yet close to our hope for life.

If we hear hints of the resurrection in that phrase, “Now about eight days after these sayings,” we might want to ask: What sayings? What happened eight days *earlier*?”

Eight days before Jesus went up that mountain with Peter, James, and John, he gathered his disciples and asked them: “Who do people say that I am?”

As the answers started to come, Jesus tightened the circle of the discussion. He also asked, “Who do *you* say that I am?”

Jesus addresses not individuals but his followers as a group. Jesus uses the second person plural. “What about all of you?” This question is not for individuals alone. It is a question that still comes to us as a congregation.

Our individual answers are important because they inform our common answer.

Peter’s response is not his alone. He speaks for the group when he asserts: “You are the Christ, the very Child of the living God.”

Hearing this response, Jesus tells his followers that he will suffer, be rejected, be killed—and on the third day be raised.

In Jesus we encounter the God who suffers as we suffer, the God who knows the human experience of being wounded and hurting deeply;

in Jesus we discover the God who knows what it means to be rejected, to have the very best one has to offer be judged as insufficient;

in Jesus we confront the God who is to be stretched to the limits of life, finding the courage for life even in the face of death.

This Jesus doesn't always match up with what we are seeking—even if he fits very well with what we desire in our deepest selves.

Eight days later, then, Moses, the lawgiver, the mediator between God and the people, and Elijah, the prophet who was to come and restore all things, suddenly appear with Jesus. The Law and the Prophets—the whole of the Hebrew scriptures, tell of God's involvement with the world. The God who creates all that is also guides God's people with the *Torah*—we call it “the Law” but “the Way” is a better translation. The God who sustains also leads God's people back with words of judgment and comfort spoken by the prophets. God does not abandon the world but in love stays with us.

Moses and Elijah speak of Jesus' “departure”—that is his death and resurrection.

And there it is once more! At the center of this strange story, in the middle of the dazzling light: the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The voice of God comes out of a cloud. In a sense it is not strange that God should speak from a cloud. The holy is always hidden from us.

That voice tells us to “listen” to Jesus.

We listen to Jesus—not just to what he says but to how he lives and how he dies. We listen also to resurrection: God's ability to bring life from death, and to hold all creation—the living *and* the dead—in God's great eternal love.

“Listen.” Listen as Jesus speaks in scripture, through prayer, as we meet together. Listen as he speaks beyond these walls in new and unexpected ways. Be still. Be open to receive the gifts God offers.

The season of Lent begins this week. It is, especially as it starts, a time of thinking about our own mortality. And, of course, these past two years have been a time of thinking about mortality as, even now, even as cases drop, the pandemic death toll continues to mount.

But even more than our own mortality, during Lent we are called to remember the life-giving death of Jesus.

On that mountain, the curtain of reality is pulled back so that we can see where we are heading. This is why we often hear this story on this Sunday before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent—and why we need to hear it today.

We get a glimpse of the *glory* of God. As we continue to move through these winter weary days, these pandemic weary days, these war-torn days, look around: the light of God shines, showing

the path that leads to new life, showing us the way of resurrection.

The Transfiguration tells us where we are heading—we are being “changed from glory into glory,” as we sing in the hymn. We are a world in process. We are a people in process. We are a congregation in process. The author of I John put it this way: “Beloved, we are God’s children now: what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: When God is revealed, we will be like God, for we will see God as God is.” (I John 3:2)

We are God’s children now—I like that. God knows what we will be.

We move onward toward new life, vitality. We move onward toward resurrection. We don’t need to be afraid. We need to listen—in every way possible—to listen to Jesus.

And remember that now, yes, even now, we are the children of God.

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<sup>1</sup> See Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, pg. 82