

I love this little story Rev. Dr. Robert Sims shares about a little boy and his wagon. Sims writes:

A little boy was riding his wagon along the sidewalk. Suddenly, one of the wheels fell off the wagon. The little boy jumped out of the wagon and said, "I'll be damned!" A minister happened to be walking by, and he said, "Son, you ought not use words like that! That's a bad word. When something happens, just say, 'Praise the Lord,' and everything will be all right." So, the little boy grumbled, put the wheel back on the wagon and started on down the sidewalk.

About ten yards farther, the wheel fell off again. The little boy said, "Praise the Lord!" Suddenly, the wheel jumped up off the ground and put itself right back on the wagon. The minister saw it all and exclaimed, "I'll be damned."

Sims goes on to say, "We are a lot like that minister. We believe in God's miraculous, glorious, transformative power; we just don't expect it to happen to us."

I think Pastor Sims' assessment is quite accurate. I think most of us are aware in the depth of our being that we need God. At times, I think we often long for a sign of God's presence to us. Yet, we don't often recognize God's presence to us in the **ordinary** stuff of life, in our ordinary daily experiences. We often do not trust God's presence to us as we face ambiguity and an uncertain future. Quite frankly, it is hard to trust God's

presence as the **world** faces an uncertain future, as we see Ukraine ruthlessly invaded by a corrupt, evil, authoritarian power. It is hard to trust God's presence as we watch an unnecessary, shameful war of aggression and see innocent people needlessly bombed, facing death, and killed. Frankly, we know that life for anyone of us can change at any minute. To use Sims' metaphor, the wheel of our wagon can fall off at any time. Faced with life's uncertainty and our lack of control, I think most of us yearn to really feel a connection with the power and presence of God. We hunger to feel God's presence to us as we face not only our present but also our tomorrows.

In today's gospel reading, the writer of Luke is taking us to a deeper engagement with faith. Written around 80 CE, Luke is writing to a Greek audience that, like us, yearns and hungers to understand more about God and God's presence in life. So, as Luke tells the Jesus story, the gospel writer tells us that **Jesus** knows **he** is facing the last weeks of his life. Jesus understands the crisis that looms before **him** as he makes his way to Jerusalem. He knows that **his** future means facing impending crucifixion. And so, what does he do? He takes Peter, James, and John with him and climbs a mountain to retreat, to spend time in prayer, to worship. As Jesus

looks to the future that awaits, he intentionally moves to spend time in prayer and worship, to spend intentional time with God.

Now, this mountain-high praying expedition comes eight days after Jesus has talked to the disciples and told them about his impending death. Theologian, David Lose, reminds us that “the eighth day, after a seven-day week, came very quickly in Christian tradition to refer to Sunday, the day of resurrection and worship, the first day of a new week and a whole new era.” Consequently, Luke is very intentional when he tells us that Jesus **chooses** to climb this mountain to pray and be in communion with God on the **eighth** day. In the early Christian church, the eighth day represented something totally new, God was about the business of doing a new thing.

Anyway, in the face of death, Jesus is resolute in fulfilling his mission as he takes three of his disciples and climbs the mountain to commune with God. And, after recently hearing all that talk about death, I am sure the disciples are really wondering just what Jesus is now up to as he drags them along on this mountain climbing mission. Once at the top, the disciples find themselves feeling more than a bit tired. In fact, as Jesus’ starts praying, Luke tells us Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep. Then, through the haze of heavy eyes, they see something

astounding. Suddenly, Jesus stands in dazzling, radiant light and his ancestor friends, Moses and Elijah, join him appearing “in glory.” It is a surreal, dazzling flashpoint that embodies the law (*Moses*), the prophets (*Elijah*), and grace (*Jesus, himself*), all in a single moment. Jesus’ disciples who, up to this point, have been merely sleepy bystanders now witness what happens.

Jesus is discussing with Moses and Elijah his crucifixion, his departure, his *exodus* from this world. As he speaks, the conversation bears witness to the redemptive mission that lies before him, the cross. Well, the ever-dim-witted disciples are awestruck, and they then hear a voice from heaven directed to them saying, “Listen to him.” The disciples are called to LISTEN to Jesus, and then be faithful to this unique revelation of Jesus the Christ. Suddenly, the disciples who had viewed Jesus as just a man, a great leader who would free them from Roman rule, saw Jesus differently. In that moment of worship, they were able to see beneath Jesus’ humanity and begin to discover the very presence, the holiness, and the glory of God.

Following this retreat to worship – strengthened and nourished by prayer, a time of hearing God’s spoken Word and being immersed in words

of the cross – they head down the mountain. You see, they cannot stay in that place. No one, not even Jesus can stay in that mountain-top experience. No, they inevitably must return to the everyday world where human need is **immediately** present. As they come down from the mountain, they are approached by an anguished father who wants healing for his only son. Jesus moves from a time of worship to face a world of need that again rises before him, and he heals the boy.

The word “*transfiguration*” means change and emphasizes a dramatic change in *appearance*, one that glorifies or exalts somebody. As we become open to Christ’s presence, **we** become changed by the grace and love of Christ. I think this story has intentional, significant meaning for us as we think about worship, about what worship means for us, and the way worship changes and transforms **us**. Worship is that place where we hear God’s voice. Worship is that place where we meet each other in prayer and song. Worship is that place where we focus on the nature of **grace** as we experience the **cross**. Worship is that place where we experience the holiness of God as we feast on God’s very life. Worship is an experience that helps us to make sense of our lives as we connect with God while facing our own ambiguous and uncertain futures. And then, we leave

worship nourished and renewed for lives of meaning. We leave worship equipped to face each day, even the uncertain future, with purpose as we live our lives in service to a needy, broken, deeply hurting world. God's transforming work in our lives is explicitly **not** supposed to be contained in worship, kept in a building, and hidden away. God's transforming work is about our very selves becoming changed, and then sent out into the world. When we become transformed, we then bear the transforming nature of God's grace and love to the broken world around us. That transformational nature we bear is a love and grace that should shine through us in the way we live, and in the places where we live out our lives.

Today we come to the end of the season of Epiphany. This Wednesday we begin our journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem and follow him to the cross. As we begin this Lenten journey, are we ready and willing to stand at the foot of the cross and be changed by the transforming power, grace, and love of Christ in the world?

As we leave worship, we leave empowered by the experience of God's very life and presence to us. We leave this place equipped so that we can again enter the world of human need and make a difference in the lives of those around us. The metaphoric wheel of the wagon will again fall

off at various times throughout our lives but, every time we gather to worship, we again become changed by the love of God in Jesus Christ. Formed and transformed through worship, **we** become one with **Christ** and then live out **Christ's** mission as we work to make God's vision for this world a reality. And, for that gift to us we say, "Praise the Lord."