

Luke 9:28-43a

Feb. 27, 2022 Transfiguration

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, sometimes I don't like how the NRSV translates things, and today is one of those days, specifically in Luke 9:41.

I don't know if Jesus has always sounded so harsh to previous generations, or if it's just my ears here in 2022. The NRSV was translated in 1989, and maybe in 1989 it didn't sound so bad, or maybe it was intentionally translated to sound kind of severe. I'm not sure. I can't remember.

All I know is that Luther said every generation should translate the Bible for themselves. It's about time for another translation, and there will be an updated version of the NRSV coming out this year.

But, I digress. My issue today is with Luke 9:41. "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you." The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God?

This translation, as found in the NRSV, makes it sound, to my ears, as if Jesus is really mad at those disciples who didn't go up the mountain with him, the ones who stayed behind and couldn't heal the son of the man who is shouting at Jesus, and I don't think it's fair.

So, here is my translation of verse 41 based on the Greek as I understand it: "You guys are lacking confidence. Why are you turning away from what I've taught you? How much longer do you need me to patiently hold your hand before you can do the work you have been sent to do?" I think that's a more fair translation that brings more meaning to what's happening.

The 9th chapter of Luke begins with the 12 disciples being given power and authority over all demons. Jesus then sends them out to cast out demons and cure diseases, which they did. They were successful and filled with joy. Upon their return they told Jesus all the wonderful things they had done.

Between that and where we are here today, with the story of the Transfiguration, we have two significant events – Peter proclaims Jesus to be the Messiah, not Elijah nor Moses, and Jesus explains that he will suffer, be rejected, killed, and on the third day rise again.

Jesus talking about his death actually bookends both sides of what we have today. Before the transfiguration and after the healing of the boy, Jesus tells the disciples he will be killed. So, that means that the transfiguration and the healing are the center of an Oreo. This is the cream filling – Peter, James, and John seeing who Jesus really is and the other disciples not being able to cast out a demon, something they had just been doing not that long ago.

I think the importance of the Gospel reading we have for today is the fact that while Jesus was on the mountain, those disciples who stayed below forgot what they had been sent to do. They lost confidence in their call and turned away from their mission, so Jesus has to do the healing for them.

Or, or maybe, because Jesus was up on the mountain, the man with the son who was possessed by a demon didn't believe that the disciples could actually do the work. That's possible as well. And maybe it was both – maybe no one believed that the healing could happen with Jesus up on the mountain – the man nor the disciples - and so it didn't. We hear about that all the time – a lack of faith prevents a lot of things from happening.

And so I wonder – is this the point at which Jesus thinks – wow - these people need the Holy Spirit. I just wonder, because Luke is part 1 of Luke/Acts, and Acts, part 2, is all about the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knows he is heading back to heaven, so he has to do something for the sake of his disciples and the world. We need help. We need God to hold our hand, always and forever, and so the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us, which include God's faith and the Church.

God's faith in us, so that we can do God's work in the world and the Church, so that at least once a week Jesus will literally hold our hands and remind us of our mission and our ability to do it.

So, as you take the wafer in your hand today and then the wine, picture Jesus holding your hand and reassuring you that you can do what you've been sent to do – you can cast out demons; you can bring healing into the world. You have been gifted with the Holy Spirit for just that reason.

And I think that in St. Francis' prayer, our mission is well summed up: To be conduits of God's peace into the world. To be loving when we are surrounded by hate. To forgive those who harm us. To bring about unity instead of division. To proclaim God's love when all seems hopeless. To talk about the resurrection in the midst of death. To be a beacon of light in the darkness. To encourage those who mourn with hope. To live not just to ourselves, but for the sake of others, putting their needs above our wants. Basically, to be Christ's hands, feet, and voices in the weary world today.

As Jesus was on the mountain, 3/4 of the disciples were still in the valley. While Jesus was away, those disciples lacked confidence that they could do Jesus' work without him, and when Jesus returned he was disappointed that they forgot what they were sent to do.

Today, Jesus is in heaven with all of those original disciples, and we are here in the valley today. Have we lost confidence in the Holy Spirit working in us, through, and among us?

Well, the good news is that we are gifted with the Church to help boost our confidence to go out these doors and bring God's grace, mercy, and hope to everyone we meet.

And, let's all agree to not make anyone beg to receive the good news from us. OK? Let's not have anyone like the man in the story desperately begging for God's good news of peace and mercy. Instead, let's just share it, openly and constantly. It is a free gift that is for anyone and everyone. It's never to be hoarded. It is always to be shared.

So, let's go and astound everyone with the greatness of God. Doesn't that sound like fun? We get to participate in astounding the world with God's greatness! Jesus is holding our hand and leading the way.

Thanks be to God. Amen.