

Sunday February 19, 2023  
Transfiguration of the Lord  
Matthew 17:1-9  
What's Next?  
Rev. Karen Stunkel

Six days ago, Arielle Anderson, Brian Fraser, Alexandria Verner, were the victims of a mass shooting at Michigan State. Five more persons have been hospitalized. The news of this, another mass shooting, has sent shock waves throughout East Lansing, the State of Michigan, and the nation. This rampage of violence has increased over one hundred percent in one year. It seems as if death is all around us. We fear for our children and grandchildren. We fear for the future of our nation. Our scripture this morning begins with these words, "Six days earlier." As we read further in the passage, we find disciples with Jesus on a mountaintop. Wonder, what was it that happened six days earlier that would propel disciples to stand in the midst of the Glory of God in the presence of Elijah, and Moses and Jesus all floating above the earth? Six days earlier, Jesus told the disciples he would be turned over to the authorities to be tortured and killed. Disciples afraid, looking for another way forward, are told to stand aside. It is as if death through violence is the inevitable outcome.

Let's begin by telling the truth: living is a precarious endeavor. The scene and setting of the incidents at Michigan State University and Jesus prediction of

violent death stand two millennia apart. And despite all of our creature comforts and scientific and technological advances, it seems little has changed. There are still terrors that assault us. Empire mentality drives nations to disrupt nations as Russia continues one year later to presume that Ukraine is their territory. Natural disasters continue to disrupt the land. The horror of lives lost in Syria and Turkey are a sign that humanity has no agency in the moving of tectonic plates. Violence perpetrated person upon person still ravages the peace of our homes and communities. Disease, pandemic, and random accidents tear lives apart. Life is not for the faint of heart.

This is the world into which Jesus steps. A world of pain and division that spans the millennia. Jesus brings good news of God's amazing love and compassion. Disciples follow this good news. When Jesus reveals his pending death, it is as if the disciples never anticipated the outcome. Teaching God's righteousness and justice in this world is a subversive act that will lead to death. Miraculous healings can destroy the relational structure of family when the named sick person is sick no more. When the poor are fed and housed and clothed, those who have much are threatened for they fear they will lose, believing resources are limited. God's good news threatens. Jesus' message to the disciples is clear, death is imminent. This news of death is not what disciples want to hear.

Jesus takes Peter and James and John up the mountain, in the midst of their trauma of his news. Jesus leads them to a space apart. A place to experience the fullness of God who has been and will be in the midst of all the news that shakes our faith.

It is on the mountaintop after six days, after Jesus speaks, that Peter shouts out to his buddies, “We got to do something to preserve this moment. Put a call into Home Depot and order the wood and the construction crew! Get them up here right away, build some booths.” It sounds just like us in the midst of our crisis. We want to be about doing something. It is as if our identity is defined only by what we do. It’s hard to stand still in the moment. Stand still and listen to God. Truth is we are human beings, not human doings. Maybe we want to stay busy so that we will not feel the pain, or the horror, or the disappointment of life. Yet maybe if we ever get quiet, we will more fully understand where God is moving in our life and what God might be calling us to do. When we are quiet, we might have to deal with whatever issues are confronting us. The answer might not be exactly what we want, what we have planned. See the transfiguration account follows on Jesus pronouncement to the disciples that they are to pick up their cross and follow. Maybe the booths are a part of Peter’s delay tactics. Maybe it seems easier to stay busy with our agenda rather than God’s agenda. Because God’s agenda just might be calling us outside of

our control, outside of our comfort zone. Maybe we stay busy just to fill the time and space, not to serve God. And we block God's will and our discerning of it. Are we really afraid that in the stillness God won't speak to us or are we really afraid that God will speak to us, and we will be compelled to follow. So, we choose to be human doings rather than human beings.

These last years have been hard. Our routines have been disrupted. We have been human doings, figuring out how to live with COVID. We have created new routines for work and school and family. We have been very busy doing and now maybe we need to take the time to be.

When persons have time to be, they have time to discern. They have time to choose. Michigan State chose to take time this past week and suspend class. They chose to close Berkey Hall, for the time being. They chose to allow students to attend school virtually. They are choosing to give space for grief and discernment.

Friends the Season of Lent begins this week. We are invited to simply be. Be in the presence of God. be in a spirit of discernment. Be fully and completely human before our God.