

Transfiguration, Year C – February 27, 2022
Luke 9:28-43 Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Luke 6:27-38
Epiphany, Winnipeg

1 I'm starting with a Facebook post. Just so you know, I don't plan to start every sermon with a Facebook post. I did two weeks ago, but I think that was the first time ever for me, and I'm doing it now and this could very well be the last. This was written by an actor named Monalisa Amidar. It goes like this:

“Ukraine matters not because of its resources or what it contributes to the global economy. Ukraine matters because there are people there, living their everyday lives; kids who go to school; people who are in pursuit of their dreams; there are families, there are animals, plants, people and their pets, somebody's grandparents, sister, brother, couples who love each other, parents caring for their children; there are communities, neighbors and friends....Ukraine matters because there are living beings there who want to and deserve to continue living and dreaming and hoping and loving”

There's been so much talk this week about Ukraine, and a lot of it has been along the lines of how it's important strategically, and we've probably all learned a little bit more history about Ukraine than we knew before, and there's been talk of military and alliances and resources and so on. We've heard about the collapse of an old world order right before our eyes, about a secure and safe and stable Europe being finished now, and SWIFT banking systems and sanctions and such. But *Ukraine matters* because there are all those people there.

It's really important to remember that, you know, and I think we all do remember that. But we'll need to be reminded too. On Thursday morning when I

woke up and heard the news about an invasion underway I for one just had this kind of blank feeling wash over me. As Russia invaded Ukraine it somehow didn't all compute; it just didn't fit with what I thought was normal. So I got a little focused on my own worries and fears about it all, and I wrote all kinds of pages in my journal where I tried to analyze it all and figure out how I feel. And we prayed for the people, but then when the prayers were done I thought and talked about Ukraine like it was a thing happening, and I saw the maps with arrows and symbols showing troop movements and timelines, like a chessboard or a football playbook. It's hard to figure out. And for all kinds of reasons I think we're a bit afraid.

But then, two or three days in, that Facebook post appeared and I remembered. All that other stuff is important, but Ukraine matters not because I'm afraid but because there are all those people.

2 A long time ago in a place far far away from Ukraine, there's this story about Jesus and Peter and James and John on a mountaintop. A few days before this happened Jesus had said to these three friends and some others that he would undergo great suffering and be rejected and killed...and raised? They had all just started following Jesus a little while ago and probably still didn't really know what they were getting themselves into, and talk like this – about suffering and dying and then that weird thing about being raised? Who knows how they received that news? Was it great, was it confusing, was it just strange, was it scary, did it just not fit?

And now Jesus takes them all up a mountain to pray, and while he prays his face changes, and his clothes change, and suddenly Moses and Elijah are there with him. Peter says, “This is great, let’s build tents so no one gets away and you’ve all got a place to stay and we can just stay here on this mountain.” Of course we don’t know what Peter was thinking, but isn’t it quite possible that he’s thinking that it’s better up here on the mountain with Jesus and bright lights and Moses and Elijah, far away from down there where Jesus talked about suffering and dying, and where there are all these people with all their troubles all around?

It’s quiet up here on the mountain. It’s good up here on the mountain where things seems to be going well. And then a cloud comes and settles on the mountain, and the way isn’t clear any more, and the fear settles in and rests on us. I wonder if this week hasn’t been a bit like that for so many of us. The way ahead isn’t really clear. One European nation invades another? Didn’t we stop with that in 1945? Or 1996...? We don’t know what’s coming along next out of this fog that the world is walking into. But if *we’re* troubled by it all...there are *all those people* in Ukraine whose lives are being turned upside down.

It’s quiet up here on the mountain. And when the wind blows the cloud away Jesus is there alone again. No more glory, no more shining like the sun, no more Moses and Elijah. Just Jesus, and three friends, and they start to pick their way down the mountain path again.

And that’s the thing. Jesus doesn’t stay on the mountain. He can’t stay on the mountain. It’s not that he has to go down so he can play his role in some strategic plan of God’s, or to do his part in a chart about how salvation happens. He knows that there will be suffering and dying – his own. But there’s no

complicated theology needed. Jesus just comes down off the mountain because there are all those people. We heard what happened. The very next day he's met by a crowd, and there's someone there who brings their sick child and they say, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, my only child. He has these seizures, he can't do anything, it's like a spirit is tormenting him." So Jesus reams out that unclean Spirit and it leaves, and Jesus gives the healthy child back to the parent who loved the child and brought the child for healing. Jesus can't stay on the mountain, because down there on the land there's this boy and these seizures and this parent who is so scared and has nowhere else to go. That's where Jesus needs to be.

The important transfiguration is not when Jesus' face shines like the sun and his clothes become dazzling white. The real transfiguration is when he turns back, and he's a regular person, dusty from the long walk up a dry mountain, with worn out shoes from all that walking, and just carrying a thing or two with him that he'll need for the next few days. The real transfiguration is when he comes down the mountain into the only place he really seems to want to be. Where there are all these people. Yes, where there is so much that's broken that will need healing, but where there is so much grace and beauty even when the broken is all around.

And the real transfiguration is when we follow Jesus off the mountain into this world – broken, but graced by the presence of Jesus. Broken, but graced by the presence of all these people.

You see, Jesus knows – and come on, we know it too – that Ukraine matters not because of its resources or what it contributes to the global economy. Ukraine matters because there are people there, living their everyday lives. Zimbabwe matters because there are kids who go to school; people who are in pursuit of their dreams. Indonesia matters because there are families, there are animals, plants, people and their pets; Shamattawa matters because of somebody's grandparents, sister, brother, couples who love each other; Fort Richmond matters because there are parents caring for their children; Winnipeg matters because there are communities, neighbors and friends....Wherever you go matters because there are living beings there who want to and deserve to continue living and dreaming and hoping and loving.

Jesus is transfigured and comes down off that mountain because there are all those people. All those people. And Jesus can't help but be there. Here. It's where Jesus wants to be. AMEN.