

When I see an in to make a sermon, a Harry Potter sermon, you know I cannot resist, and so once that idea sprung into my head this week, I decided to run with it. In the world of Harry Potter, there are a lot of classes that go into creating a well-rounded witch or wizard. History of Magic, Potions, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, they're all vital to developing young minds into witches and wizards who can use their skills appropriately. There is one other class though that is mandatory for all students at Hogwarts, and it is apt to mention it today, as it shares the same name with the festival that we are celebrating today...Transfiguration.

The heart of this class is exactly what it sounds like. One takes Transfiguration with the goal of honing the ability to transform one object into another. Something that would obviously come in handy in the wider world. In their second year at Hogwarts, Harry's best friend Ron is attempting to transform his pet rat into a water goblet. Why you would want to do this I do not know, but oh well. Now here's the problem, Ron is attempting to perform this spell with a broken wand that is held together with a couple of pieces of tape. The result is fairly disastrous. His water goblet is in the right shape, but it's furry and it has a tail. The issue is though that his broken wand isn't Ron's only problem.

Ron's other problem is his focus. He tends to not quite believe in his magical capabilities and so when he's performing spells, particularly new ones, he's already thinking about the end product. He's thinking about the result, not about the process that needs to flow through him, through his wand, through his words to make the whole thing come together. He's so focused on the destination that he forgets that doing magic properly is actually a bit of a journey. Now of course, taking that journey with a wand that has been snapped in half is going to make getting to the desired destination a little harder, however, there still needs to be a recognition that every step of the journey is vital to getting you to the correct end result. You can't be thinking about your picture-perfect water goblet when you still have a full grown, fluffy rat sitting on your desk.

So, no I am not going so far as to say that what happens here on the mountain of the Transfiguration is magic, but if there were any characters in Harry Potter that the disciples are akin to, it is Ron Weasley in all of his messiness. The one who has the heart of the hero, but his own foibles get in the way more often than not. The one who is loyal to a fault, until he's upset about something. The one who is always, always, always far more concerned about the destination rather than keeping his eye on the journey which lies before him.

So, let's set some context here for what is going on in Luke's gospel because we're jumping a bit ahead of where we have been for the last few weeks. Jesus' ministry has been building and picking up and eight days prior to the Transfiguration, he realizes that he and the disciples are at a major turning point. Jesus realizes that it is time for the disciples to have all the cards on the table. So, eight days ago, Jesus has had the who do you think I am conversation with them. Eight days ago, Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, and eight days ago Jesus told them all that he is going to die. This trip that they're taking to Jerusalem, it's not going to end well. There is going to be struggle and pain and heartbreak and grief, and when it's all said and done, they will have watched him die, even if he gives them the assurance that somehow, some way he will rise again three days later.

This is obviously information that takes a little processing, and Jesus seems to give the disciples that time, because Luke doesn't tell us anything that happens for the next week. We fast forward and Jesus is taking James, John, and Peter with him up a mountain to pray. You can imagine that the four of them have a great deal to pray about and ponder, though the angle of those prayers are all probably very different. So, they take this time, all seems to be very quiet, and the time seems to linger because James, John, and Peter are starting to get tired. Heavy with sleep they realize that

something is happening on this mountain. Jesus is awash in white, his clothes are dazzling, and his face seems to have changed, and they are no longer alone. There stand Moses and Elijah, the two most important prophets of their faith, and they're talking to Jesus about everything he just told them was going to happen in Jerusalem.

Eventually, roused from their sleepiness, Peter tries to mitigate the situation and see if Jesus wants them to build dwellings there on the mountain for the three of them. It seems Peter has it in his mind to make their journey end *now*. The destination is *here*. No Jerusalem. No death. Here. But that doesn't work. God's voice echoes telling them that Jesus is God's chosen and they must listen to what he says. Moses and Elijah disappear, and they head back down the mountain only to find that all chaos has broken loose.

The rest of the disciples have been swarmed by a crowd of people who are sick, who are tired, who are in need of the type of healing that only Jesus can give. Except...by this point, Jesus had given over to the disciple's authority to exorcise demons and heal those who were in need. Yet, Jesus and the other three come down the mountain and things have seemingly gotten out of hand. There is a man whose son is being tortured by a demon. He just wants his boy ok, safe, healed. He asked the disciples. They

couldn't do it. No matter how much they tried, they couldn't free this boy from his demon. Only Jesus. Only Jesus who rebukes the demon *after* laying into the disciples for not being able to do this. A perverse and faithless generation he calls them...not exactly a ringing endorsement for their faith and ministry efforts. Jesus seems to look at what the disciples attempted and he's like, I don't get it. You should be able to do this. Where is your faith? Where is your mission? And I think possibly the answer to both of those questions is that their faith is already looking towards the destination. Their mission is overshadowed by what they know is coming.

You would think, in Jesus' shoes, it would have made logical sense as he came down from the mountain of Transfiguration, as he just went through this insanely powerful moment, hearing again from God that he is cherished and loved, talking with Moses and Elijah, and confirming the end of his journey, that he would also be looking towards Jerusalem. You can imagine the crowds being a little bit of a blur and Jesus just wanting to get on with the journey, but Jesus gets down from the mountain and is essentially like, back to business, folks!! Heal the sick, walk with the lost, rend the chains that bind people. He wants the disciples to realize that while he has told them the endgame plan, why they're going to Jerusalem, that doesn't make the rest of the journey irrelevant, it doesn't change the day-to-day mission, it

doesn't change what they're called to do here on the ground. Even though they now know the end, the journey doesn't change.

It's a message we need to hear as we are preparing to enter into the Lenten season, and as we continue to walk as people of faith in God's world that is more often than not immensely messed up. Lent isn't fun, and we just want to jump to Easter because we know that's the ultimate destination. We don't want to put in the work of the journey, confront our sins that need confessing, our habits that need adjusting, our idols we need to smash to pieces so we can get back to truly worshipping God. The world we live in isn't always a blast. It's hard and messy and breaks our hearts and more often than not we don't want to put in the daily work of discipleship, more content to rest on the assurance of grace, eternal life, and resurrection, because if that's the final promise what's the point of all this messy ministry work anyway?

The point is the journey. If we spent this Lenten season, our very lives, Ron Weasleying through everything, then the end result is always going to be a little skewed, not as ideal as it could be. If we skip over Lent and just jump to Easter, the pain of the cross and the absolute joy of the empty tomb are going to ring a little bit hollow. If we don't take time to process just what Jesus is dying for, then the power of the destination is

going to be a little duller. If we skip over all the moments in this life that present us with a moment for ministry, with a moment to reach out to our siblings and offer them a word of hope, a word of healing, a word of love, because we're so focused on the endgame of life, then when we get there and look back on how we have lived, we're going to feel a bit like a water goblet with a tail, like we aren't our most complete selves.

It's kind of cliché to say that there is joy in the journey, so instead let us say that there is ministry in the journey, there is mission in the journey, there are more opportunities for love and gospel in the journey than we could ever imagine. And when we find those moments, we may want to jump to the end and wonder what is in this for me? How can I maneuver this magic to benefit me the most in the end, and that just isn't the point, of life, of faith, of ministry. We are in this for each other, trusting that when we get to the destination, yeah, we're going to be taken care of, so we can spend every minute of the journey focusing on loving our siblings, caring for them as best as we possibly can. Life isn't all about the mountaintop moments, the destination moments, life is a series of steps in a lifelong journey with God and each other, the question is simply if we're going to take the steps for the gifts they are, or ignore them and let our lives transfigure into something less than what we could be? **AMEN!!!**