

## **CELEBRATION!**

### **2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-13**

#### **Transfiguration Sunday**

Welcome to our service to celebrate – not in any order of significance – the Transfiguration of our Lord, the Life of Johnnie Suggs and his ministry with us at FPC, the end of the Season of Epiphany, and the Sunday before we enter into the Season of Lent. The transfiguration is a glimpse of glory! Every year, just before we enter into Lent, Christians go mountain climbing to get a glimpse of what is to come, to get a glimpse of the glory of God as it shines forth in and through Jesus. Today we go mountain climbing with Jesus, to experience the light shining in the darkest places of this world. We go to the mountain with Jesus, like James, John and Peter, to get a glimpse of what will be, of what is to come, of the promise that is ours through the coming death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today we also celebrate the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Johnnie Suggs. Throughout my time as your Transitional Minister I have reminded you that each person in this place, at this particular point and time, is here by God's design and for a particular purpose. Each of us is called to this place to accomplish God's plan for ministry at FPC. Johnnie was here for a purpose. First, Johnnie demonstrated to each of us what it was like to leave and how to come back home and be welcomed with open arms. He once told me that as he was led back to FPC, he realized that the hardest part was walking back through the door! Though he had thought of coming back (I believe that was the sweet, small voice of God), he simply could not bring himself to walk through the door that first time. However, as God often acts through us when we least expect it, a chance encounter with Lib in the grocery store removed the doubt and fear. In conversation, Lib asked him, "Where are you worshipping now?" Johnnie's response: "I've not found a church." To which Lib said, "Why don't you come home?"

And Johnnie came home! There is a story in scripture that reminds us of coming home....and being welcomed as if we had never left. Johnnie shared that when he came in that first Sunday after being gone for a long while, it felt as if he had never left. Everyone welcomed him and in his words, "Even the carpet, with all the dirty spots, was the same." Johnny was here when a new Treasurer was needed. Johnnie was here when someone needed to be trained in using the sound system, was here nearly every Sunday and for special services to project and amplify the words shared to the glory of God. Johnny was here when called upon to serve as Gods disciple and your representative in the office of elder. Johnnie was here to serve on the Transition Committee that interviewed and hired me as your interim minister. Johnnie was here when called upon the teach the adult Sunday School class. And in each of these and many other ways of service, Johnnie served God and was faithful to Gods call on his life to this, his church home and family. Johnnie glorified God and lived his life as a witness to the glory of God.

And now, Johnnie has received the reward of his life as he has seen the glory of God as revealed in the scripture for today: the light of God shining. We climb the mountain of transfiguration each year before Lent for the same reasons Moses climbed Mount Pisgah: to see the Promised Land, and to see where we are going.

*Come dance on the west winds and touch on the mountain tops,"* wrote John Denver.  
*Sail o're the canyons and up to the stars. And reach for the heavens and hope for the future, for all that we can be and not what we are.*

All that we can be and not what we are. When Jesus arrived at the mountain top his figure changed and the outside of him, which had been like one of us, shone as if he was not like us, fore he was changed...as those who have gone before us have been changed.

As the familiar hymn says, "*When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God' praise than when we first begun.*"

The glimpse that we get of heaven when we climb to this mountain top, is the image of what God intended us to be at Creation.

Today, as we come to the table of our Lord, we are reminded of that mountaintop experience, where Moses, Elijah, and Elisha were also gathered with Jesus, Peter, James and John. When we gather at this table, we do not come here alone, but are joined together with all the saints who have gone before us. We come to receive this Holy Meal, receiving the Bread of Life, in light of the promise we have been given and for which we seek, the promise of life everlasting, living in the glory of God for all eternity.

When I think of this, I am reminded of the last scene of a favorite movie, *Places in the Heart*. Early in the movie, the beloved sheriff was shot and killed by a young, black man, intoxicated and brandishing a gun, leaving behind a wife and two small children, who struggled to make ends meet and pay for the farm on which they lived. Subsequently, the young man was killed, a blind man grudgingly came to live with the widow and her children. In this scene, pay particular attention to the beginning as they are gathered in church. You will note that the congregation is sparse. However, as the Communion is served from one to the other, you will see every seat filled.

Today as we take the blessed food of our Lord, we commune with each one gathered in this room that we can see, but also gathered with us are others...Johnnie is at the table with us; Gail communes with us; Virginia is with us. Every seat is filled.