

**The Transfiguration of Our Lord**  
**February 6-7, 2016**  
**Luke 9:28-36**

***“Necessary Departure of Our Neighbor”***

I have this stumpy little pencil here in my hand – a reminder of my recent trip to Haiti with our congregation’s Servant Mission Team. This is really a pencil in name only. You can’t sharpen it anymore because it’s too short to fit into any pencil sharpener. The eraser is long gone, and for most of us, we would have thrown it out long ago. But not in Haiti! In this poorest country in the western hemisphere, everything gets re-used or recycled or re-purposed until you can’t use it anymore for anything. Thus, this pencil – tiny and stubby as it is – still has some use in it. I think this is a pencil only a mother (or a teacher) could love. It is from the Village of Hope School which we visited, and one of those 651 students there in Kindergarten through Grade 13 must have dropped this. This pencil is a reminder to me of the new neighbors that I met there in Haiti – neighbors in whom I saw the face of Jesus. After only one week there, we had to leave these new neighbors, and depart to return home. That isn’t always easy to do, is it? We will soon be entering the time of year when people will be relocating with new work assignments and jobs that will take them to new places. Some of you have already shared that this will be happening to you in the year ahead. And so there is a necessary departure that takes place, as one chapter of life closes and another one opens. On this final Sunday of the Epiphany season, we travel up the mountain with Peter, John, and James. In heart and mind, we are with them as Jesus is transfigured before them: **“the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white”** (Luke 9:29). Those towering figures of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, are there with Jesus, representing the Law and the Prophets. Of all the Gospel writers, Luke alone records that as Moses and Elijah were there with Jesus, they **“spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem”** (Luke 9:31). The original word here for “departure” is actually “exodus.” Jesus, the eternal Word of God who became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14), who came to be our Neighbor, was facing his own departure – the departure of his earthly life when he would offer up his sinless life on the cross on that hillside outside of Jerusalem. With this in mind, as our **Serving Jesus – Living in Community (Being SJLC) 2016** focus comes to a close this weekend, the theme for preaching is “Necessary Departure of Our Neighbor.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

So what’s it like when a much-loved neighbor has to make a necessary departure, leaving us? We’re happy for them if their departure means a job promotion or if the move is for positive reasons. But it still hurt and leave a void in our life. Oh sure, we promise to stay in touch, but it’s not the same after that departure and they leave the orbit of our shared lives. Conversely, maybe you know what it’s like to be the one doing the departing; pulling up stakes and leaving good friends and neighbors behind. And maybe that is why Peter said what he did up there on the mountain top. After pinching himself to make sure that this wasn’t a dream (we’re told that Peter, James and John were sleeping), after hearing Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus about his departure, maybe it was just too much for Peter to take in. And so he blurted out: **“Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”** (Luke 9:33). “Rather than think about that necessary departure of Jesus, let’s just stay up here forever.” That is a tempting thing, and we can’t be too hard on Peter. We wouldn’t have done any better if we had been there, and probably would have said something even stranger than what Peter did. Whether it is Jesus’ departure or the good neighbor-friend who lives next door, we don’t to let go and release them or ourselves into the Lord’s care and keeping. We want to hold on with all our might because it is what *I want*, which may be in direct conflict with God’s greater plan for my life and that of my neighbor. I am reminded of what a commencement speaker said many years ago to the graduates: “To leave this place is sad. To remain in this place would be tragic.” Jesus had a necessary departure to fulfill, and we do as well. At different times in life, we also must make that necessary departure.

It is here on the mountain top of transfiguration that the first part of Luke's Gospel comes to a climax. Jesus' true identity is revealed, and chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel is all about who Jesus really is. Earlier in this same chapter, Herod is perplexed about Jesus' identity (9:9), and thinks that maybe John the Baptist whom he had beheaded was raised from the dead. Jesus then asks his disciples who the crowds say that he is (9:18), and then asks those same disciples who they think he is (9:20). Peter replies: **"You are the Christ of God"** (Luke 9:20), not fully understanding what this means. In response to Peter's reply, Jesus told the disciples to keep his identity a secret, and revealed what was to come: **"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised"** (Luke 9:22). The truth is that when Peter says that Jesus is the "Christ of God," he and the disciples are thinking *glory*. In contrast, Jesus orders them to be silent and points them to his *cross*. This is where Jesus' necessary departure will take him: down the mountain of transfiguration into the valley of suffering and rejection, and then up another mountain, Mount Calvary, where he would give his life on the cross as payment for the sins of his neighbors – you and me and all people. If there is any confusion about Jesus' identity, that is cleared up while still there on the mountain of transfiguration. The Father's voice affirms who Jesus really is: **"This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"** (Luke 9:35).

So if we are listening to Jesus, we will come to see and believe that Jesus' necessary departure – the necessity of his suffering and death (see Luke (9:44; 12:50; 13:33; 17:25; 18:31-34; 24:7, 25-26, 44-46) – was not some random act of violence; not just another example of man's inhumanity to man. No, this was God's own plan of salvation to rescue and redeem us all, so that we might be blessed with that full and abundant life that Jesus came to bring (John 10:10). Luke alone records that there on the mountain top the disciples **"saw his glory"** (Luke 9:32). Only once in Luke's Gospel does Jesus speak of his glory, and that is after his resurrection on the road to Emmaus as he explains to the two disciples what has taken place: **"Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself"** (Luke 24:26-27). All this Jesus has done that we might be his neighbors, and if we are Jesus' neighbors, we are then neighbors to one another.

Whatever departures we may have in this life – necessary or otherwise – we turn them over to the Lord's care and keeping, entrusting ourselves and our neighbors into his hands. In a larger sense, **Serving Jesus – Living in Community 2016** is not ending, but continuing on as we seek to follow Jesus and serve him by serving our neighbor in daily life. May God make it so for Jesus' sake. Amen.