

A New Year Wish
Luke 9:28-36

In January, I missed the chance to preach to you in the first Sunday of the New Year. I was away in Hong Kong. So this is my second chance!

Although we still need to wait one more day for the official arrival of the first day of the Lunar New Year, I wish you all a happy New Year. With all the possible greetings Chinese around the world say during these days, I think the most important greeting would be wishing you a healthy life. This is the Year of the Monkey. The Chinese culture says monkey is playful, youthful in nature, and is a joy to watch as they move from activity to activity. I hope that is the case, and we will be actively singing God's praise.

This is our first joint service of the year. We are a community of learning. We are diverse, active, and we want to celebrate whenever we come together.

It is good to worship together and learn together. Although it may take courage and patience, we are committed to find out how we can do ministry in this day and age. It begins with us being willing to listen to each other, willing to improve our working relationship, and most importantly, committing ourselves to be a community of love and grace. With listening, we can be channels of blessings to others. If we can't experience Christ's love in this community with the people already here, there is no point in talking about doing mission for others.

At the beginning of the New Year, I wish that this mindset becomes one of our working principles. Although we are diverse and have various opinions about many things, we have gathered together by one Lord, Jesus Christ. As it in the case when we gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper today, it is the invitation of Jesus that set us apart from other communities. We are messengers of peace. May we be motivated to live out this truth this year.

Just like the Chinese fruit tray we put out in the Lunar New Year, perhaps not everyone does it anymore, but when you see one, there are usually different kinds of sweets and nuts gathered together on one tray. It is part of the celebration of the Lunar New Year; it is part of the Chinese cultural heritage. We don't normally eat these foods. But on these few days, we treat our guests this way to show our hospitality. It also shows that diversity, variations, and differences aren't

our enemy. We find ways to share our differences as we respect each other uniqueness. What is needed is the will to sit together as one family.

In our world of many troubles, we need to be the hope for the weary, not because we are able, but God is able. We are God's instruments put together in one place, to show the world there is another way to live.

Today as we celebrate the Lunar New Year, the Christian world celebrates Transfiguration Sunday. Today is not only the last day of the existing Lunar Year, but also the last Sunday of the Epiphany season. The new church season called Lent is coming up. On this Sunday, we hear the text describing the mountain top experience of Jesus and his disciples. Peter, John and James had the luxury of witnessing the glorious splendor of Moses and Elijah; and Jesus' face was transfigured. We are reminded how the glory of Jesus, hasn't been and experienced by his disciples prompted a conversation and it gives us much to reflect upon. This mountain top experience is crucial for the church. Here are the reasons why.

First, this is a rich story that challenges what we think we know about Jesus, God, or anything spiritual. It tells us that even Jesus' disciples who walked, ate and learned from Jesus directly everyday were frightened by his glorious manifestation. Therefore, we the church can be encouraged to know that what we think we already know may still be questioned and changed. Our biggest challenge to spiritual growth is our previously known knowledge and experience of Jesus and the world. Not to suggest what we know is bad, but maybe what we know is not the fullest of God's truth. Not to suggest what we know is wrong, but what we know has a need to be adjusted and revised. This same Jesus continues to open himself up to us, and sometimes we may find it frightening. Frightening because it shows how inadequate our known experience of God is.

This beautiful story helps motivate us to go to people and to serve. Despite their frightened state, Peter thought it would be nice to put up three shelters. Why? Well, maybe to contain their puzzling questions. The text says Peter did not know what he was saying. No, they haven't stayed here. These saints have no need of shelters. The subsequent text that we did not read today says they go back down the mountain. And then what happens? A large crowd met Jesus.

Jesus' mission is to serve people. May we also do the same. The questions Peter, James and John had didn't seem to have been solved while on the mountain. But Jesus didn't wait for them to figure out everything before going back down the mountain to continue his ministry. No, we don't need to have all our questions solved before serving others. It is paradoxical sometimes, that it is through serving people that our questions solved. Our knowledge and experience are meant for the world of broken people. Let's us be kind to one another. Let's go to people and serve with kindness and grace.

Lastly, this story helps the church not to be complacent but always reforming and looking forward to face the unknown, the mysterious, and the puzzling questions of the time. Christians love to refer to their past. Yes, on the one hand, the past provides good lessons for us to learn, to be better, or to avoid traps. But the past can also become our Golden Cow where we think we have captured the divine in our image and decide to stay there forever. Let the church follow the voice of the one who continues to challenge our understanding. Learning to listen to the voice of Jesus, not our previously known knowledge and experience, can be the direction we want to go this year. May God bless you and the church. Amen.