

**The House of Hope Presbyterian Church**  
**February 11, 2018**  
**Transfiguration Sunday**

**Texts:** 2 Kings 2:1-12  
Mark 9:2-9

**Title:** The Roads We Travel

It's been a couple weeks now since that whole Super Bowl thing came to town. All those big names and such to entertain us, beginning with Idina Menzel, Tony Award winner as Elphaba in the Broadway play *Wicked*.

Except, when Idina Menzel kicked off the whole Super Bowl party thing, she didn't sing her Broadway song, but rather a song from a movie she never appeared in, except by voice: "Let It Go," from the animated feature *Frozen*.

*Let it go, let it go  
Can't hold it back anymore  
Let it go, let it go  
Turn away and slam the door!  
I don't care what they're going to say  
Let the storm rage on  
The cold never bothered me anyway.*

Let It Go has variously been described as "an incredible anthem of liberation" and "a stirring tribute to girl power and the need to 'let go' of fear and shame." After the film came out, there was speculation that Elsa was intended as a positive representation of LGBTQ youth, or a self-affirmation of people on the autism spectrum.

Let It Go won the Oscar, the Grammy, the Golden Globe, and hit the Billboard Top-10 list. More importantly, it won our hearts.

I wonder if songs like Let It Go capture us as they do because they give us words to explain life's circumstances. Goodness knows we can use the help. We walk the roads of our lives in a kind of terrible freedom, don't we. We do everything we possibly can to ensure success, stability and happiness, and inevitably it's not enough. And in those moments when it all seems to be slipping away—an illness or death, the breakup of a relationship, the loss of a job, the rejection from your first-choice college—that we look somewhere, anywhere—maybe Princess Elsa—for some kind of assurance that there is something in all of this that makes sense, that will make us stronger, that will make us better.

Sometimes this human inclination to make meaning of our circumstances is incredibly helpful. Amidst the job loss, the accident, that ending of a significant relationship, a child's rebellion, we

are able claim for ourselves a learning, an inspiration, some new insight that can give us hope along life's journey. That's why this happened, we say, as if putting an explanation, any explanation, to something makes it okay.

But that's who we are as humans, meaning-makers. All of us, trying to make sense of life and its circumstances—and that reality lands us squarely in the middle of today's text from Mark.

The road these disciples had travelled with Jesus had been a remarkable one. In just a short period of time, they'd seen demons cast out. Lepers healed. A girl was brought back from death to life. Jesus walked on water, and five thousand were fed from a small picnic basket. But Jesus had also been run out of Nazareth by a mob. John the Baptist had been killed by Herod. Religious leaders had begun to challenge Jesus, who in turn had quietly predicted his own death to the disciples.

One can imagine that the question, What does this all mean, was never very far from the disciples' thoughts.

And then comes this, this incredible, mind-bending, reality-altering experience atop the mountain that we call the Transfiguration. In one stunning moment, Jesus goes dazzling white; Moses and Elijah appear, and are talking with Jesus; and out of the fog comes a voice—the voice of God. And then, just as quickly, it's all over. And Jesus tells them not to talk about it.

How do you make sense of that? I mean, imagine yourself up on Lutsen Mountain with the three or four people you love the most, and suddenly Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. are standing next to you. And then they aren't. You know something happened, to be sure; something unimaginable, something unexplainable. But what? And even if you can begin to explain it, what to do about it?

Peter proposed the first-century equivalent of posting it on Instagram or Facebook. Let's build three dwellings, monuments; let's memorialize this moment and this place, giving it the meaning it deserves, so that everyone can experience what we experienced.

Because we're human, we ask why. We try to make meaning out of unexplainable events. We write songs and tell stories and build monuments that attempt to make sense of it all, right or wrong, and often so we can simply exhale and keep being who we are.

But sometimes, it's different; sometimes, in ways we can neither quantify or explain, life happens in a manner we can never quite explain or measure. We only know we can never be the same again.

Perhaps the greatest transformation that takes place on the mountain is not Jesus' Transfiguration, or Moses and Elijah appearing, or even God's voice, but what that experience did to those disciples, and to their own understanding of who they were and what they'd signed up for.

The healings and the crowds and the miracles—as astounding as those things were, they were things, things you might or might not be able to make sense of but could at least try.

This experience was something different. On top of that mountain, Peter, James and John saw Jesus in a whole new light, one so bright, so otherworldly, that they are left terrified and tongue-tied. But in seeing Jesus in a whole new light, they also begin to see themselves and this journey they are on in a whole new light, too. Beginning with the hard truth that Jesus does not allow his disciples to stay in safe spaces, far above the chaos and needs of the world.

Maybe the same is true for us—that we don't have to explain all those significant moments of life so much as let them explain us...and then change us. I can't explain why people who have been egregiously wronged offer forgiveness; why those who've been deeply wounded still greet the sunshine of a new day with energy, imagination, and love; why some extend generosity without the slightest thought of reciprocity.

I can't explain it, but I know those times have changed me.

Perhaps you've read about Kate Bowler, the Duke University professor diagnosed with incurable cancer at age 35. Her new memoir, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*, was released this week.

When asked by *Time* magazine how a cancer diagnosis has affected her, what meaning she takes out of it, Kate Bowler said this, in the context of being a parent: *"I decided that my job is not to try to make the world safe. I think I thought you just create a beautiful, Instagram-y bubble for your kid, and then that's parenting. And then I realized that I was going to be the worst thing that happened to him if it went badly. I decided that my new parenting philosophy is that I can't protect him from the pain of the world, but I can show him that there is truth and beauty in the midst of it. And if I can make him that person, then I have won as a parent."*

Let It Go was the proper anthem for the beginning of the Super Bowl party, all glitz and happy and poofy, the personal triumph of the human spirit. But if we let Idina Menzel begin this sermon, perhaps we let her end it as well, with a song less bubbly and positive but more realistic; a song of transfiguration and transformation; the one she sang as Elphaba, the wicked witch of the west:

*It well may be  
That we will never meet again  
In this lifetime.  
So, let me say before we part:  
So much of me  
Is made of what I learned from you.  
You'll be with me  
Like a handprint on my heart.  
And now whatever way our stories end*

*I know you have rewritten mine.  
Who can say if I've been changed for the better  
But because I knew you...  
I have been changed for good.*

For in those moments when the settled lives we've constructed are unsettled—perhaps not in a way as dramatic as Mark describes but in the ordinary hopes, encounters, and tragedies of our everyday life—transfiguration points us forward. Instead of trying to look back and fit those challenging, difficult moments into the nice, tidy life we've constructed, much like Peter wanted to do, we can instead create space to actually experience the wonder and mystery of God. A space to learn and to grow, a space into which we will journey, and accompany others on their journey, finding meaning together in the mystery of God and God's love. A search for meaning, not simply explanation.

This is the road we travel beginning this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, the journey of Lent. We don't set off on this road because we understand where exactly it will lead us, or everything about the One we follow, any more than those disciples understood what they had seen on that mountain. We set off because we've heard something so compelling about our traveling partner that we simply cannot stay behind. We can't necessarily explain it, but we know it will change us.

This is my Son, the beloved. Listen to him.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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