

Pastor Lauren Dow Wegner  
Transfiguration B  
Mark 9:2-9

One day when I was little—  
Probably about 4 years old—  
I found this envelope in my room.  
It wasn't sealed, so I opened it up,  
And there was a bunch of hair in it—  
Small little clippings of hair.  
I was curious about it,  
And I just took the hair out,  
Little by little,  
Probably thinking,  
“Hey, I'm being helpful. I'm cleaning out this  
envelope. There shouldn't be hair in an  
envelope.”  
And my mom walks in,  
Claps her hand over her mouth,  
Runs over to me,  
And snatches the envelope out of my hand,  
Saying, “Lauren, what are you doing?  
This is hair from your first haircut!”  
I didn't get why it was so important back then,  
But now I do.  
Oh, how I do.  
My mom is one of the most sentimental people I know,  
Which explains where I get my own sentimentality.  
I want to hold onto every moment—  
Every enjoyable or meaningful one, that is.  
Starting in my young adult life,  
I can recall numerous times when I have paused and thought to  
myself,  
“Hold onto this.”

College nights with friends,

Laughing and dreaming together, without a care in the world.

“Hold onto this.”

My wedding day,

Holding Dave’s hand as we walked down the aisle singing the final hymn with all those people who had gathered to witness and celebrate with us.

“Hold onto this.”

Rocking my babies,

Feeling their fuzzy newborn hair against my cheek,  
Sniffing their sweet baby smell,

Holding their chubby toddler hands in mine,

And still today, cradling their sleepy heads in the nook of my shoulder.

“Hold onto this,” I think.

I take thousands of pictures and videos.

It seems my life goal is to capture and hold onto everything I experience.

And so, I identify with Peter in our Gospel today,

Who wanted to set up dwellings for the transfigured Jesus,  
Moses, and Elijah—

Dwellings that would keep them there.

That would stop time,

That would suspend all else.

Elisha, too, in our first reading,

Wants to hold onto Elijah and every moment with him.  
Even when Elijah tells him several times,  
“Elisha, stay here, for I am moving on to the next  
place.”  
Elisha responds, “I will not leave you.”

Elisha is holding on.

And indeed, Elisha’s holding on leads to that amazing moment of  
seeing Elijah taken into heaven.

But Peter’s holding on is followed by a voice from a cloud,  
A voice that proclaims,  
“This is my Son, the beloved: listen to him!”  
And from there, everything changes on that mountaintop,  
Moses and Elijah have disappeared,  
And Jesus remains,  
To take Peter and James and John down from the  
mountain,  
And to tell them what is to come—  
That the Son of Man will rise from the dead.

There’s a lot of holding on that we do.  
And it’s not always a product of sentimentality.  
Sometimes it’s about anger—  
Holding onto grudges or festering emotional wounds.  
Sometimes it’s about fear—  
Holding ourselves back in life because we are scared.  
Sometimes it’s not even about us, but about others—  
Holding onto impossible standards for others to attain.  
Holding onto our big opinions about others based on a  
few small encounters.

We hold onto so much,

For good and for ill.  
And, like Peter,  
We easily and quickly assume that this—whatever this is—must  
be grabbed,  
And held,  
And made to stay put.

But thanks be to God that Jesus doesn't stay put.  
Jesus can't be made to stay put,  
Not in our own mountaintop experiences,  
Not in our constructions of who He is.  
Thanks be to God that Jesus doesn't stay put,  
That Jesus instead goes down the mountain with Peter and James  
and John,  
That Jesus, after being transfigured in order to show and  
declare just who He is,  
Returns to his purpose on earth—  
His journey to the cross.

Thanks be to God that Jesus doesn't stay put,  
But rather goes forth,  
Right into suffering and torture,  
Right into the realities of our sin,  
Right into death.

Jesus doesn't stay put in death, either.  
And because of this,  
Neither do we.

In Jesus' death,  
We die.  
In Jesus' rising from that death,  
We live.

Our experiences of Jesus don't have to be held onto as one singular moment in time that can never be recreated.

Baptism is both a one-time and every-day event,  
As we are renewed daily in our rebirth in Jesus Christ,  
A splash of water can remind us of this every day.  
Holy Communion is our frequent experience of Jesus Christ,  
As we are nourished with bread and wine,  
Body and blood,  
Gifts we hold, take in, and live out as we are  
strengthened for service.

We can hold onto Jesus,  
But not for long,  
Because in truth,  
Jesus holds onto us.  
And he takes us with him down from the  
mountaintop,  
Into the margins,  
Away from our expectations,  
Fears,  
And selves.

We can hold onto Jesus,  
But never for very long,  
Before he moves on ahead and carries us with him.

The interesting thing about my sentimentality,  
Is that the numerous pictures and videos I have taken of my kids  
over the past few years,  
Rarely get viewed after I record them.  
Sure, there are a few of my favorites that I go back and watch when I'm  
feeling nostalgic.

But the majority of them sit on my phone and computer.  
I don't sit and watch them all the time,  
Because even though upon recording, I wanted to hold onto that  
moment forever,  
The reality is that that moment came and went,  
And my life moved on from it,  
And there was more to be experienced,  
More to witness,  
More to live.

The transfigured Jesus was surely a sight to behold,  
An experience to remember,  
An important declaration and command from God—"This is  
my Son: Listen to Him."

But the transfiguration was a moment,  
Not the whole story.

The transfiguration couldn't be held onto,  
Because Jesus was set to finish that story,  
And to bring us into that story.

And so we will listen to him.

We will follow him from here.

We will walk with him into Lent.

And when it comes to holding on,

We will always find that Jesus is the one holding onto us.