

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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One of my special moments was always when we stood on top of a mountain very early in the morning. But even after a long hike, reaching the top is something special. At this moment, everything was made up for. For getting up early and for the strenuous ascent. You were simply happy. And I was simply in awe of God's creation. Intoxicated by the magnificent view. The valleys and plains lie very small at your feet. Everyday life and daily worries are far away. I could stay up there for hours and just enjoy the view.

Our Gospel today also tells of a mountain. Mount Tabor, where, according to tradition, the event reported in today's Gospel took place. The Hebrew word Tabor means world or navel of the world. So, it is no surprise that Mount Tabor stands, visible from afar, like a huge monument in the Jezreel plain south of Nazareth.

Tabor has always been considered a holy mountain. In the past, you had to climb it on foot.

Today, you can take a cab to the top. There are numerous narrow hairpin bends leading steeply up the mountain. Once at the top, you will not only experience wonderful nature with lots of flowers, you will also be rewarded with a magnificent view. People who were already there told me that on a clear day, you can see the whole of northern Israel from the Mediterranean in the west to the Golan Heights in the east. I tell you it was impressive.

“Master, it is good that we are here,” said Peter at this spot 2000 years ago. The beautiful view alone would have made it understandable that Peter liked it up there and that he would have liked to stay, I think to myself. I just love being outdoors. There is so much to see and experience. And God's creation is simply unique.

“Master, it is good that we are here,” said Peter. “Master, it is good that we are here. We want to build three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.

“But Peter is not saying this because of the beautiful landscape, because he sees something else entirely. Something that leaves him almost beside himself: “While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his robe became bright white. And suddenly two men were talking to him. They were Moses and Elijah; they appeared in radiant light and spoke of his end, which was to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.” For a brief moment, Peter and the two other disciples are allowed to experience who Jesus really is. As if through a crack, they are allowed a glimpse into a deeper reality. For a brief moment, the veil is lifted. In the great creed we pray: Jesus Christ is “God from God, light from light.” The disciples on Tabor were allowed to experience this.

Moses and Elijah were two of God's greatest servants in the Old Testament who had suffered a great deal themselves. Moses carried the people for 40 years; Elijah labored for God when almost everyone in Israel had turned their backs on God. Their appearance in a transfigured form shows that they lived in God, even though their life on earth had already been over for centuries. They talked to Jesus about his end in Jerusalem, encouraging him to prepare for his suffering and death on the cross and

strengthening his confidence in his resurrection. By appearing in transfigured form, they not only completed the glorious scene; they also testified by their appearance that there really is life after death and that in God all live.

So it really was something special that happened up there on the mountain. So it's no wonder that there has been a church on Mount Tabor since the first Christian centuries. The current building was erected 90 years ago by the Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi.

A visit to the mountain must include entering this church, viewing the large mosaic in the apse, which depicts the Transfiguration of Jesus, and spending some time there in prayer. The event of the Transfiguration cannot be explained, any more than you can explain the beautiful view on a mountain or even the feelings that come over you there. You can only approach the event in prayer and participate in it.

Jesus wants his disciples - and us - to participate in the event of the transfiguration. And this happens in prayer. Right at the beginning of the Gospel, it says that Jesus went up the mountain with the disciples "to pray" and that he was transformed "while he was praying".

Prayer is the key to the process of transformation, for Jesus and for ourselves. There is a power in prayer that transforms. You can't go out in the sun without getting a tan. Nor can you jump into the water without getting wet. So you can't pray without being transformed. Praying means encountering God, and this encounter transforms people.

Jesus prays again and again. He takes his disciples with him to pray, he exhorts them to pray at all times. This is very important to him. He knows that people only change when they pray.

Anyone who seriously tries to change themselves, other people or even the world very quickly realizes that it is not that easy. It starts with ourselves and on a small scale.

Who helps us to resolve our neighborhood disputes? Who gives us the strength to forgive? Who helps us to overcome hurts? Where do we put our frustration and aggression? Do we always have no choice but to take it out on others? Many things in life can only change if they are taken into the great relationship with God in prayer, where they are redeemed and transformed.

Prayer is a power that transforms and makes new. Let us make time for it in these forty days before Easter.