

St. John's Lynchburg

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany

- [2 Kings 2:1-12](#)
- [2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#)
- [Mark 9:2-9](#)
- [Psalm 50:1-6](#)

Good morning! I am your seminarian, home this weekend after a month back at Sewanee's School of Theology where, once again, I am a student. I spent all of last year at Sewanee during my sabbatical year from Lynchburg College. The bishop, the Commission on Ministry, and I had planned for me to complete my studies in local formation and by way of online classes. That was a good plan—in theory. The reality was that the classes I needed just weren't at my fingertips. And so I am back on the mountain in beautiful Sewanee for one final semester. Some at the School of Theology have kindly called this return a victory lap. I like to think of it as a bonus year. My path has most surely been an unusual one, defined by an intent—a call—to live into a bi-vocational life of ordained ministry while maintaining my life as a college professor.

The scenes from my daily life at Sewanee are not all that different from scenes of everyday life in Lynchburg. I go to class, I read and study, I spend time writing and agonizing over writing. There are grades—although I'm on the receiving, not the giving side of the grades—and it is true, it is better to give than to receive!

There, I live in a house full of men, which feels familiar to the family of three sons that Jerry and I have now launched. But, in many ways, it's pretty radically different, too. The men that I live with now—four fellow seminarians—don't actually depend on me for food or laundry or

allowance. And likewise, I can easily step over any pile of books or dirty socks without feeling the need to compel them to clean up after themselves.

The TV at my Sewanee house is rarely on. We did not watch the Duke-Carolina game last week. We didn't even watch the Superbowl. The last time the TV was on at the Sewanee house, my housemates and several of their friends gathered to watch and sing along with a German opera. I can say with certainty that this has never happened in my Lynchburg house!

Juxtaposed side by side, still frames of life in Lynchburg alongside those of life in Sewanee are remarkably similar on the surface. The disruptions of difference unsettle me into growth and change as I look back over my shoulder and simultaneously gaze ahead towards the horizon. I'm aware of both past and future as important to who I am, to the process of becoming who I will be in the fullness of God's creation.

Today is the last Sunday after Epiphany. This lone Sunday sits in a place between a season of light—Epiphany—and a season of darkness—Lent. The Transfiguration of Jesus marks a change. It looks backward to the foundation, to Moses, to Elijah—the law and the prophets. And it looks ahead at what is to come—the glory of Christ. Our readings today recall the past and imagine the future in the remarkable ways of the lectionary also.

The readings from the Old Testament and from Mark's Gospel cut across time and space. Elijah and Elisha are swept on a whirlwind into to heaven—possibly looking ahead to the ascension of Jesus that awaits. Elijah rolls up his mantle and strikes the waters of the Jordan to create a dry

path, looking back to Moses' parting of the Red Sea, which had occurred more than half a century earlier. And in the moment of Jesus' transfiguration, Moses and Elijah skip centuries forward in time to appear alongside Jesus before the terrified eyes of Peter and James and John.

The transfiguration of Jesus requires of us a strange angle of vision. Oddly placed, smack in the middle of Mark's gospel, it seems to function as a hinge, looking backward just as it looks forward. Along with Peter, James, and John, we behold the configuration of Moses and Elijah, alongside Jesus, who is forecast here as Lord. We are positioned here on the cusp of Lent, a season of penitence, of waiting, with Jesus' crucifixion and the subsequent Happy Morning of Easter that awaits on the first day of April.

We stand in this space today, looking back over our shoulder at the Feast of the Epiphany and simultaneously casting our gaze ahead, seeking the first glimpses of the risen Christ on the horizon.

Emily Jacir is a contemporary artist, a Palestinian-born photographer whose works hang in the Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art. She's known for blurring boundaries between art and life, boundaries between time and place. Jacir digs into the history of memory and trauma. She describes her work as "wandering through space and time."

One recent exhibit juxtaposes scenes from everyday life, still frames—in a barbershop, a diner, a convenience store—scenes from the Palestinian city of Ramallah and scenes from New York. The images are similarly composed. The figures in the photographs are doing the same things

and the surroundings are alike in composition. By placing these nearly identical compositions side by side in a frame, Jacir disrupts the view. There is a displacement of the angle of vision. Looking on at side-by-side images of ordinary people in ordinary places but across very different borders—Palestine and New York—generates a kind of disorientation. The viewer's gaze is split or doubled vacillating between frames, going back and forth crossing borders, trying to locate a center of gravity. This disruption generates an ambivalent position, an uncertainty, a destabilization.

Jacir seeks to create with her art what occurs as a matter of course so often in our lives. This place of uncertainty is where today's Gospel places us—and yet, it can also to be a reassurance if we adjust our angle of vision. We are so often caught in time and space, looking backward and ahead. This odd angle of vision of looking back at Epiphany and the coming of the Christ child and simultaneously looking ahead to what we hang our Christian hope on offers us this place of splitting, a place of rupture, a threshold.

In many ways, our lives are so often lived in this space of the threshold. Disruptions in our life, deaths of beloved friends and neighbors; disruptions in the life of this congregation—impending destabilization, change, newness—they all cause us to look back and at once look ahead. We should not rush to leave behind our sadness. It is part of us. But how might this disruptive place become a place for wholeness?

We are caught today—and so often—between time and place, vacillating between the assurances and stability of the past, with Elijah and Moses, and the hope of the future—the glory of the Messiah, resplendent in dazzling white, lord and ruler of all yet to come.

Today, suspended as we are, between still frames of past and future, shift your angle of vision for a moment. Lift your gaze from the twin images of the baby Jesus and the risen Lord, expanding your angle of vision to include Creator God. Take refuge in the one who gave you life, the one who loves you. Let God be your rock and your stronghold during this season of uncertainty and *every* time of uncertainty. Remember the promise of the resurrection and this foretelling of the God’s glory. Let His face shine upon you that you might bask in the comfort and surety of His love. As Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians: “it is ... God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”