

What God has in store next (Matthew 17:1-9)

It's hard to let go of what we once had.

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In May 2021 our first grandchild arrived.

The call came and we drove faster than radar could detect from Pennsylvania to Massachusetts. My wife walked into the hospital as the one visitor allowed during COVID restrictions and held her first grandchild. The very next day I was elated to learn it was my turn.

We helped them get home and as our “kids” took care of their kid, we were able to help here and there. My heart was full when I was handed a wailing newborn and asked to work my patented combination of bouncing and shushing to help her fall asleep. It was amazing.

We would have been forgiven for wanting time to stand still.

But time doesn't stand still, it moves on, and when we saw them just a few months later our granddaughter was bigger and so very attentive to everything around her and a lot harder to shush.

After more time passed than we would have liked, we again were able to visit with our favorite family of three. The once infant was now crawling and eating finger foods in a big chair and had definite opinions on who would be shushing her—and it wasn't me.

It's hard to let go of what we once had. But I wouldn't have it any other way. Time marches on, and we get to see what God has in store for us next.

Our ministries have their own timelines and histories. The congregation I serve was born out of another church when members didn't want to have to ride their horses so far out of town on a Sunday morning.

Their first building is downtown, and although the congregation is now outside of town (less than a mile away), the building still exists. I have stood in the spot where their beloved former pastor once stood and thought about how his name is still a reference point for many in the current congregation.

It was a different era then, the golden age of denominations. A time when church mattered (or at least going to church mattered) and that version of our congregation had to move out to a larger parcel of land to accommodate everyone.

If only we could have frozen time and stopped right there—maybe set up some tents and kept things exactly like they were.

It's hard to let go of what we once had. It's hard not to look back and point fingers at whoever's decision it was to come down off the mountain of high attendance and growth. But the truth is, time marches on and we get to see what God has in store for us next.

Transfiguration is the annual Sunday when we roll our eyes at Peter for wanting to set up tents, though really none of us can blame him. We're the ones who try to capture the day every year, to somehow routinize the presence of God's glory. It is not a good look when we tell God what is good and what should stay. God has God's own plan.

If we stay frozen in one spot, we miss God doing a new thing. God *with* us.

No one would confuse the last few years with a mountaintop experience. At times it felt more like a tunnel, and we remain a little unsure of whether or not we're fully out of it. And if we are, then shifting attendance and giving and volunteering landscapes beg the question: Where are we now?

What is the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel for us? The church has so much to offer both inside and outside our walls. God is calling us to be the light of the world, which means we have to keep moving. We can't just stay in one place,

whether it's a mountaintop or a tunnel.

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