

Last Epiphany Sermon
The Rev. Megan Dembi

Even before Lydia was born, I kept hearing one piece of advice over and over again—enjoy every moment. Enjoy every moment with your baby because before you know it babies grow up, they'll be out of the house in the blink of an eye, and you'll wonder where all the time went. And I think this can be really good advice, but only up to a point. Sometimes in the midst of our busy lives it's hard to stop and enjoy the beautiful moments, so trying to savor each and every one of them is understandable—but there's also a flipside to this.

Especially in this day and age, when most people have phones that double as cameras and it's so easy to take pictures or videos of even the most mundane events in our lives, we have a tendency to try to capture the best moments that happen to us. If we go out to a nice restaurant and have a great meal, many people will take a picture of their food before digging in. Depending on how into social media someone is, they may not even enjoy their meal until it's cold, while they spend 15 minutes trying to find just the right angle and just the right lighting to make their chicken cordon bleu look just as delicious in the picture as it does in real life. If we go to our grandkids' baseball game, we may spend so much time trying to get some video of him up at bat that we cannot even track the fact that he just hit the ball out of the park. We may be so excited to tell everyone about a wedding we are attending that we cannot look up from our Facebook feed. It makes sense that these moments mean something special to us, and that we'd try to do everything we could to document them. But sometimes trying to capture the moment prevents us from fully experiencing it.

Long ago, on a high mountain top, Peter, James, and John witnessed something miraculous. Jesus, whom they had been following all across the Galilean countryside, suddenly transformed before their eyes, and "his clothes become dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them." That in-and-of-itself would have been a tweetable moment, but that was only the beginning of what they were about to behold. Elijah and Moses, two prophets of old who had died *a long* time ago, appeared and began speaking with Jesus. This tweetable event just got kicked up ten notches, and Peter cannot handle it. Peter couldn't make a Facebook post about it. He couldn't tweet about it. He couldn't even take a picture of the sparkling white Jesus somehow speaking to two of God's long-dead messengers. But Peter fell into a trap that many of us fall prey to today—he tried to capture the moment.

"Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'" He was terrified and didn't know what to do, so he suggested the only thing he could think of—let's build something tangible to remember what has happened here. But not all moments are meant to be captured. Far more often, each and every moment in our lives is meant to be *lived*. And when we try to document each and every moment, we lose sight of that.

But Jesus, of course, knew better than Peter that his transfiguration up on the mountaintop was all part of the larger story that had to be lived out in order for the world to be saved. Jesus knew that although at the time he seemed to be glorified, exalted, and breathtaking, he would soon be scourged, mocked, and betrayed. Soon after the Gospel reading, Jesus "sets his face towards Jerusalem," the city in which he would be given up to the authorities so he would be unjustly sentenced to death, and executed gruesomely by crucifixion.

You might think that would give Jesus all the more reason to want to capture that moment. If he was about to die, wouldn't he want some sort of physical reminder of the wonderful thing that had just happened to him? It is true that looking back at pictures or letters from the past can bring us joy. But they can only bring us joy if we took the time to experience those moments. Studies have shown that when we take a picture of something, we're less likely to remember it. Our brain subconsciously things we don't need to remember that event anymore, as we can always just look back on that picture.

But a picture of a happy moment does nothing if we cannot place ourselves back during that time, remembering what we thought, heard, saw, or smelled in that moment.

This is especially true when it comes to our faith. It's wonderful to be able to recall certain times in our lives when we felt especially close to God, when we felt our faith was especially strong. But if we become preoccupied with experiencing specific moments of clarity rather than building a firm foundation, we'll always end up disappointed.

The other day I was recording Lydia in her jumper. She has ridiculously strong legs, and the whole jumper will shake alarmingly as she bounces up and down—and she LOVES it! She had the biggest smile on her face, and was so happy. And every once in a while she would pause to look at me, and wait for me to smile back before going back to jumping. So I was recording Lydia basically destroying her jumper, when she stopped to look at me. I smiled back at her, like I always do, but she didn't go back to jumping. She saw my phone was out, and started focusing on that instead. So I put my phone away, she started bouncing around like crazy, and I sat back and enjoyed watching her have the time of her life.

Before we enter into the season of Lent, let us resolve to live in the moment—to fully experience each event in our lives, both good and bad. That doesn't mean we can't document anything (I still take plenty of pictures of Lyds) but it *does* mean prioritizing living our lives rather than recording our lives. Let us not put pressure on ourselves to have specific God-moments, but to further develop our relationship with God at all times. And let us embrace all aspects of the journey of this season of Lent, giving up our preconceived ideas of what our Lenten experience *should* be and instead looking towards where God is calling us in each and every moment. Amen.