

This Lent we are going to talk about culture. Culture includes our beliefs, art, values, customs, holidays, habits that we acquire as a member of a group. Why? Because Jesus was continually inviting the people he interacted with to look at culture, first their culture but also others—looking at how culture is a play in the Bible stories we read.

We are going to use the IDI as a tool. The Intercultural Development Inventory gives each person that takes it a snapshot of where they are on a continuum of cultural awareness: detail, polarization, minimization, acceptance, or adaptation. One of the reasons we are doing this is Jesus said, but also other cultures are all around us: at work, school, the store. God calls us to be in the world and in order to do that we need to know about our culture and how to interact with people of other cultures. The IDI and the discussion we have on Wednesday nights will help us do this.

A number of us have already taken the IDI (raise hands) it's not that difficult and it's not some shaming thing telling you that you are a bad person. In taking it you will be in the top 99% of people because you will know where you are in your development. And Lent is the perfect time to do this to reflect on all that God has done for us and what God is calling us to do and be.

Every Sunday morning we gather together and read from the Bible—last September we started reading the Bible, the story of God's interactions with God's people, from beginning to end. We started with the creation story in Genesis, we followed God's people into slavery in Egypt, they received Ten Commandments and wandered in the desert for forty years, God's people entered the Promise Land, soon Kings began to rule and prophets called for justice. At Christmas we began reading the story of Jesus as told by the Gospel of Luke. For the last three weeks we read from chapter 7. We skipped chapter 8 and the beginning of 9, many of those stories we read from last year in Matthew. Today's reading is the last story before Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem, spoiler alert if this is your first time reading Jesus' story, Jesus dies in Jerusalem, fulfills his purpose/mission in Jerusalem.

Readings from Luke 9:28-45.

What is the Transfiguration? Jesus lit up like the Las Vegas strip. Having your “name in lights” is a saying that means you’ve made it, your successful. And that is what is going on in this story. Another thing that says you’ve reached the top is a gold medal and Cara Lang knows something about that. (Cara joins Kjell upfront) Cara before you tell us about the Paralympic Gold Medal will you give us a snap shot of who you are?

Cara: First, I got connection with Peace Lutheran because I’m a Thrivent representative and I want to help Peace learn more about things like Action Teams and Thrivent Choice Dollars. But about me, I grew up in St. Cloud and went to a Catholic church there. I played volleyball at St. Cloud State and got a degree in Sports Statistics, did Graduate work and coached at South Dakota State. Worked with USA Volleyball. I’m a wife to Joe and mom of two (sorry I never asked their names and ages) and we live in Maple Grove. I got connected with the seated volleyball before the Beijing Olympics doing statistics work with the team there. For the London Olympics I was the Assistant Coach and we took silver, losing to China, who has always been dominant. At London part of what kept us from Gold was the mental and off court part, so part of my prep for Rio was getting a masters in Sports Psychology.

Kjell: Cara before meeting you I didn’t know much about seated volleyball. Will you tell us just a bit about it and set up this next video clip?

Cara: Seated volleyball has been part of the Paralympics since Sydney and basically you have to stay seated

during play. This clip is at the beginning of the gold-medal game with China in Rio. Here were up... 20-14 in third set and we had won the previous two. Here is Head Coach Bill telling the women (know the set up better than I....). This next clip is right at the end of the match (I’m thinking China’s ace to through some of the celebration). (Maybe tell a bit about what was going through your head/heart at this point).

Kjell: Like winning a gold medal the story of the Transfiguration looks very triumphant and glorious. One of the things my seventh grade English teacher, Mrs. Herslip taught me was to pay attention to the setting, where and when is the story taking place—and so I always check to see what is happening before and after a reading. Just before this Jesus asks, “Who do you say I am?” and Peter answers, “You are the Christ of God,” then Jesus predicts his coming death—the truth about what it means for Jesus to be Messiah—to suffer, die and be raised from the dead. Then after the Transfiguration and healing Jesus again tells about his coming death saying, “Let these words sink into your ears.” The Transfiguration is God publicly declaring who Jesus is, it is his name in lights, but when the lights and clouds disappears Jesus is alone and the disciples say nothing. Jesus is changed/transfigured but coming down from the mountain brings him back to real life, healing the sick, a renewed sense of calling and purpose and mission, the mountain tops bring clarity to our everyday.

We often use everyday as another way of saying boring or dull and winning a Gold medal is far from an everyday experience, but Cara, how has winning a gold medal

changed your everyday or how has it brought clarity to the rest of your life.

Cara: Competing at this level helped me better know who I am and what matters to me. I am: a Christian, wife, mother, I work with Thrivent, I am a coach. My work with the USA Paralympics meant a lot of time away, my husband, Joe, and I have two children and the time that coaching at this level **takes**... for the last ten years it's meant a long weekend every month in Oklahoma practicing, the team would be gone a month a year to a international competition and then every Olympic-year would be another month away, it was really hard being gone and being away from my family, but it was also hard knowing how hard my husband had to work to make it all work at home, it was extremely stressful being a coach on the court and off. For me what it took was focus on what my priorities are—my first priority is my faith and keeping that first made the rest possible, not easy but possible. It's not flashy or shinny but what held it all together for me was prayer—staying connected to God.

Kjell: Cara, that is really helpful and when I read the Bible I see your story playing out in Jesus life too. Jesus was often heading off to pray. All of us have mountain top experiences, events that help us to clarify and name what matters to us, but living that out that mission/purpose everyday is what it means to be faithful.

The disciples say nothing about Jesus' transfiguration, but we have the story so they must have told someone eventually. And maybe part of the power and glory of this story is that they witness to the entirety of the story—their

silence and their terror. Cara I think **that's** part of what makes your story inspiring to me, yes it is awesome that you are a gold-metal winning coach, but your honesty about the struggles with that and how hard it was/is to live out your calling in your daily life is inspiring. Thank you Cara for sharing your story with us (Cara sits down).

Maybe life isn't supposed to be easy, fore sure the Bible never promises us an easy life, what Jesus promises is, "You will have life and have it more **abundantly**." Maybe that abundance is all tied up in the messiness of relationships, as a wife, husband, parent, teacher, coach, student, team member or a Grandma or a Grandpa. Maybe the life that Jesus calls us to is one of being real and being connected. Meeting each other in our inability to get it all right and get it all done and supporting each other in our unique work of making the world a better place is the faithful life. Jesus life, death and resurrection frees us to live wholeheartedly/faithfully. Jesus love allows us to make mistakes and fall and get back up and try again. Jesus love fuels us in our mountaintop, gold-metal moments and Jesus love energizes our everyday. We are loved always in all ways. Amen.