

Transfiguration B 14 February 2021
Mark 9:2-9
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace, Dear Saints from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. Let's pray:

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. Transfiguration means a change of form, metamorphosis. Yet, Jesus doesn't change into something he wasn't before. Neither are the disciples simply spectators but participants.

Hence, this story is not only about the transfiguration of Christ, but also the transformation, the transfiguration, of the disciples. The transfiguration shows us the archetypal beauty of our image. The glorified Christ is the model and prototype of who we were created in the image of and who we'll become. The transfiguration reveals our origin and our *telos* – our completion and fullness. Like the disciples, we aren't simply spectators. We too participate in this event. So how does that happen? When was the last time you experienced transfiguration?

There are two aspects of the Transfiguration I want to talk about today, and the first is listening.

We're often captivated by the vivid images in this story: the change in appearance of Jesus' face [Matthew 17:2; Luke 9:29], clothes that become dazzling white, the appearance of Moses and Elijah, the glory of Christ, and the overshadowing cloud. No doubt, these features are significant to the transfiguration. But we mustn't emphasise the light of transfiguration at the expense of the voice of transfiguration. We look, but do we listen?

“Listen” is the only thing the disciples are told to do throughout this whole event. Listening is central to transfiguration. A voice came from the cloud and said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Father speaks but Jesus is silent. So, it's about more than words, instructions, and lessons. True listening

is more about the heart than the ears. And it's more about silence than words [Remember that after Elijah fled from Jezebel and sheltered in a cave on Mt Horeb, he found solace in the still, small voice of God]. Listening is about presence.

The disciples are being told to be present, be open, be receptive to the One who is already and always present to you. Listening creates an opening through which the transfigured Christ enters and transforms us. Listening demands of us intention, attention, and letting go of the things that deafen us. Anything that destroys or limits presence is a form of deafness. Some examples:

- Holding onto the past – guilt, sins, regrets, disappointments, sorrow, and losses;
- Perfectionism, self-doubt, and self-hatred;
- Fear, anxiety, and the resulting need to control;
- Competition, comparison, expectation and judgement;
- Anger, resentment, and condemnation.

Whether it's listening to God, our spouses, friends, children, co-workers, the poor and needy, strangers or enemies, listening is some of the most difficult, yet, most rewarding work we do. Listening is another spiritual practice. It opens us to healing, reconciliation, and union. Ultimately, listening takes us back to the Mount of Transfiguration, to Jesus, the Christ.

The second aspect to the Transfiguration is seeing.

An image I enjoy recalling is the moment a couple make their matrimonial vows. Face to face, eye to eye. In that moment, nothing exists in the universe but each other. That moment holds everything. It is, however, more than just a bride and groom. They're a part of something much bigger than themselves. There's more going on than what physical eyes can see or understand. They've entered a mystery that can only be experienced.

There're moments like that in every life. Lovers gazing at each other see more than just another person. They're brought face to face with the mystery of love. Think about the very first time you held your child or grandchild. You saw more than a baby. You were face to face with the mystery of life. Look at

a little child who squeals with excitement. It's more than excitement. The child comes face to face with the mystery of deep joy. Remember a time you experienced forgiveness. It's more than relief from guilt, shame, or anxious feelings. You came face to face with the mystery of grace amidst brokenness. Even in those anxious moments when we wait and watch for a loved one to be raised up and carried into new life, we spend time face to face with the mystery of death.

These are all moments of transfiguration. Each one of them is distinct, unique, and unrepeatable. Yet, they're somehow the same. Each one is so transparent, so real, it glows with the light of God's presence. It's a moment of pure grace. We can't make it happen. We can only be there when it does happen. In that moment everything around us seems to fall away. There're no distractions. It's a moment of complete presence, attention, and union. It's a moment when we come face to face with another person, with ourselves, and ultimately with God. In that moment we can truthfully say, "I have eyes only for you."

There's nothing else to be seen. That moment holds the entire world and all of life. Nothing else matters, not because it's unimportant, but because everything belongs. Everything is captured in that moment. Nothing has been lost or left out. It's a moment of union with God, another person, and ourself. We experience the union of heaven and earth, divinity and humanity, spirit and matter, time and eternity.

That's what happened to Peter, James, and John on the mountain in today's gospel. "When they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. They didn't see Moses or Elijah, each other, the cloud, or the mountain. Everything and everyone was contained in Jesus himself alone. They didn't just see the light they became the light; humanity illumined with and enveloped by divine glory.

Jesus didn't become something he wasn't before that night on the mountain. He was always filled with the glory of God, radiating the divine light. Jesus didn't change and become something new but the disciples did. Their sight was healed, their vision corrected, and their blindness removed. They saw the world transfigured, capable of revealing the beauty of God's holiness. They experienced all of life and creation filled with God's love. They saw and

experienced life and the world as God sees and intends it, if only for a fleeting moment.

Every time we experience a transfiguring event our vision is healed and we see in a new and different way. We see with God's eyes. Transfiguration is about how we see. It's the difference between seeing with physical eyes and seeing with transfigured eyes. If we only see with physical eyes, we'll always be looking for love, bored with life, bereft of joy, bound by guilt, and in fear of death.

Do we want to live as if what we see is all we get or will we let our seeing bring us face to face with the Mystery? Transfigured eyes don't deny or ignore the circumstances of our life or world. Rather, they show us that sometimes despite those circumstances there is nothing but God, there is only God; there is nothing but life, there is only life; there is nothing but love, there is only love; and there is nothing but light, there is only light.

This deeper seeing, this transfigured vision, is what allows us to respond to and endure the circumstances of our life and world. It allows us to get up and not be afraid and it's the source of our thanksgiving. It literally puts us in the scriptures alongside Jesus and the disciples. This transfigured vision sustained the disciples through Jesus' crucifixion and to his resurrection. Perhaps that's why the Church asks us to hear the transfiguration story every year on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany. It's the beginning of our Lenten preparation. It's the hinge between the two Seasons. Throughout the Season of Epiphany God has turned his face towards humanity. Lent is the season when we learn anew to turn our face toward God, that we might look up and see Jesus himself alone everywhere we look.

In doing so, may you learn to seek God in Jesus alone and receive comfort and peace from his assurance that he has called you by name; you are his; you are precious in his sight, and honoured, and he loves you – whom he created for his glory (Isaiah 43:1-7). Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.