

Sermon for Last Epiphany A  
Sunday, February 19, 2023  
“Transformed to Transcend”

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“This is my Son, my beloved, in whom I am well-pleased.” These are the words from heaven that begin and end the season of Epiphany: at the Baptism of Our Lord on the First Sunday after the Epiphany and at the Transfiguration on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany. Twice God reveals himself in his fullness to humankind. At the Transfiguration the fullness of Christ is shown to Peter, James, and John; it brings closure to Epiphanytide and leads us into the season of Lent, which will begin on Wednesday.

For starters, let us not confuse the meaning of transfiguration with transformation. Transformation is where something is changed from one form to another, like a caterpillar to a moth or butterfly, or perhaps an electrical transformer that changes electrical current into different voltages of electricity. Those of you with kids might be familiar with transformers; creatures that look like ordinary objects (a car or a truck) but changes into a giant robotic superhero when needed to save the day. But Jesus was not transformed, he was *transfigured*; his appearance changed such that he was seen in his most exalted state. His face changed and his clothes became dazzling white. For a brief moment, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus for who he really was. They got a glimpse of God in his full glory in Jesus Christ; his being, his substance, however, remained unchanged.

This moment was extremely important, especially for Peter, James, and John. Jesus had been very busy in the previous two weeks: he defended the scriptures in front of a group of Pharisees and scribes, he healed a foreign woman’s daughter from afar simply because the mother had incredible faith, he cured many other people, he miraculously fed four thousand people with seven loaves of bread and two fish, yet the Pharisees and scribes still couldn’t recognize who Jesus really was and continued to ask him for more signs. So, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” After a bit of guessing, Peter finally declared, “You are the Messiah, Son of the living God.” Then Jesus told them the fate he must endure in order to fully claim the glory of his Messiahship, including his own death and resurrection. Peter, the very person who recognized Jesus, refused to believe him when he foretold how his glorification would unfold. The Transfiguration needed to take place, because the disciples just weren’t getting it; they needed to be hit over the head with a sign. In the words of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century Church Father, St. John Chrysostom, the Transfiguration had to take place “To show the glory of the cross, and to console Peter and the others in their dread of the passion, and to raise up their minds.” In that moment, God gave them the sign they needed by declaring as he had at Jesus’s baptism: “This is my son; with him I am well-pleased. Listen to him.”

The tension in this story is that the disciples were too consumed by what they saw to pay attention to what they *heard*. When they tried to process what they saw, they

were so dazzled, they didn't know what to say, especially Peter who suggested they make booths for Moses and Elijah.

The Transfiguration is all about us *hearing* Jesus, heeding what he has do say to us, going and doing likewise. Nowadays we spend far too much time dwelling on the things we see, or if we are listening to someone, it turns out to be the propaganda we are inundated with on Instagram, TikTok, the news networks, or—heaven help us—tabloids. We are not spending enough time listening to the words of Jesus, much less doing likewise. That's why we need Lent: to slow us down so we can listen to God.

The transfiguration is intended to transform us. Jesus was not changed, but we *are* supposed to change. We are supposed to be transformed into something different, someone different who does not succumb to the pressures the world puts upon us, but, rather, is lifted up through Christ in his glorious majesty, listening to his divine words. He told us to love God and love our neighbor as ourself. He told us a lot of other things, but it all boiled down to that: loving God and in doing so, loving and respecting each other. The Transfiguration in which Jesus was revealed in his glory bids us to listen to him and be transformed into beings that transcend the trappings of the world. Why? Because we know the impact of the Passion and Resurrection, which Jesus foretold at the Transfiguration, and we know to be true today. What do we hear today in the story of the Transfiguration? What in your own life needs to change? How do you need to be transformed by the Transfiguration?

In a few days, the season of Lent will begin. Those forty days until Holy Week will be a time to slow down, reset, restart, and try to be transformed into someone better, wiser, more loving, and in closer relationship to God. The Transfiguration should inspire us to be better proclaimers of the good news of Jesus Christ and Lent should give us the space to think about how that can be accomplished.

We live in a world with many ups and downs. We have to be careful not to be consumed by the things we see and the people we see doing it. We have to live in this world, engage the world, and be engaged. The transformation that we experience in the Transfiguration should guide us from day to day, hour by hour, year to year. We should love God, we should love ourselves, we should love our neighbor, and we should respect all of God's creation, we should see God moving in good times or situations and in bad times or situations. If God is our focus, then we are living the experience of the Transfiguration—not dwelling on the things we see, but listening to the things God is saying to us. In our love and charity, we are living the Transfiguration. We are living the two commandments on which hang all the Law and the Prophets. After all, Moses (the bringer of the Law) and Elijah (the greatest of the prophets) appeared at the Transfiguration to give their nod. The Transfiguration revealed God in his majestic glory. May it transform us into the people of God who transcend the kingdoms and powers of this world and help reveal a glimpse of God's kingdom and power. Amen.

## Resources

Scott Hoezee, “Commentary on Matthew 17:1-9,” [http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/last-epiphany-a/?type=the\\_lectionary\\_gospel](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/last-epiphany-a/?type=the_lectionary_gospel)

<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/sttransfig/ChysosGospel.html>

<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/sttransfig/Augustine.html>