

Sermon for the Solemnity of the Transfiguration  
Sunday, August 7, 2022  
“Transfiguration for Transformation”

Text: Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Luke 9:28-36

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

Today as we celebrate the Solemnity of the Transfiguration of Our Lord I want to ask the question: How will the story of Christ’s Transfiguration help us transform your life today? Transfiguration is a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state. At the Transfiguration, Jesus experienced a complete change of appearance into a more beautiful, divine state; what Peter, James, and John saw was a complete vision of Jesus in his resurrected fullness. That vision of Christ’s transfiguration reinforced Jesus’s true identity and showed them the glory of God, but it also prepared them to go back to the people and continue to help Jesus in his ministry until his departure. Ministry that is meant to be done together.

Just before the Transfiguration event, Jesus had fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” Some said John the Baptist, who had recently been beheaded by Herod, others said Elijah, still others said another of the great prophets. But Peter said, “You are the Messiah.” Peter recognized fully who Jesus was. Then he warned them that following him wouldn’t be easy; it would mean taking up their cross and following him. If anyone wished to conform to the ways of the world to save their life, they would lose it; but, if they were willing to lose their life for his sake, they would save it. Then he told them that some would not taste death before they would see the kingdom of God. Jesus was preparing his disciples for a vision they could never have imagined. Eight days later, Peter, John, and James witnessed the Transfiguration.

When God reveals himself, things become bright, things become clearer. Moses met God on Mt. Sinai. As we heard in the reading from Exodus, his face shone so brightly that he had to wear a veil, and in that encounter, understood better what he was to do for the Israelites, and he revealed to them more of God’s commandments. At the transfiguration of Jesus Christ, God was revealing his future glory by whose Resurrection the greatest glorification of God would be declared: the redemption and salvation of all humanity. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were discussing his departure; they were discussing his eventual Resurrection and Ascension. The disciples saw Jesus with pierced hands and feet. If you’ve ever looked at our Transfiguration Window in the back of the church, you will see this story beautifully depicted.

The other thing to note is who appeared with Jesus. Moses, the bringer of the Law and Elijah, the great prophet. What do all three have in common? Scripture tells us that they were all taken up into heaven. In the Transfiguration, God is revealing Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. And, all of this happened in community, because community is at the heart of the Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John were

there to witness the Transfiguration, and they beheld Jesus in his resurrected glory flanked by Moses and Elijah. One senses a hint of the Trinity in this vision—God in three persons, the divine community in union and communion with itself. One of the lessons of the Transfiguration story is that the glory of God is fully revealed when lived together, in community. Nobody, not even Jesus, could shine alone! The work of that Trinity shows that only when we are together that God’s radiance can light each other’s lives. Community was important in Jesus’ time, community was important in Luke’s time when he wrote the gospel for a new Christian community trying to understand itself, and community is important for us in our own time. We are the hands and feet of God. When we put our gifts and talents together, we can do many things; we can do God’s work.

The other thing to take note of in the Transfiguration story is the experience of Peter, James, and John who were witnesses to that awe-inspiring event. They were dazed, dazzled, and utterly discombobulated. The gospel reading tells us that they were about to fall asleep in the middle of the day when Jesus’s clothes became dazzling white, so bright that it outshone the sun. Peter saw Jesus in his resurrected glory and immediately declared that it was good for them to be there, because they were in the presence of God’s fullness, along with Moses and Elijah. Did you ever wonder how Peter knew who Moses and Elijah were? It’s not like he would have ever seen a picture of them; that technology didn’t exist yet, and it was not the custom of Jews at that time to paint representations of people or create statues of them like the Romans and Greeks did. Peter certainly would have known stories about them from the Scriptures and from the stories told about them, but in that dazzling moment, he recognized them. Perhaps Peter had been given a moment of special divine inspiration that he recognized the bringer of the law and the prototype and greatest of the Prophets. But then in the next instant he makes a faux pas, as St. Luke wrote in the gospel: “He did not know what he was saying.” While he had a glimpse of Jesus as the fulfillment of the law and the Prophets, he spoke as though Moses and Elijah were equal to Jesus and each worthy of their own booths. Jews were commanded in the book of Leviticus to erect booths during an annual festival in which they remembered of their deliverance from slavery at the Red Sea and their ancestors’ wandering in the wilderness for forty years afterward. But booths were for people, for those who remained under the law; Moses and Elijah were in spirit and weren’t in need of booths and Jesus didn’t need one either. Peter in that moment was so overwhelmed by the experience that he couldn’t think straight. Have you ever been right on the verge of deep sleep when a loud noise suddenly awakens you? It usually startles us, and for a brief moment, we find ourselves completely out of sorts, confused, and unable to think straight. In the end, God spoke to them and declared Jesus as God’s incarnation on earth, and told them to listen to him.

There are three insights that we should hope to gain from the story of the Transfiguration. First that we should always try to recognize God’s presence in the world. In the midst of all our difficulties and triumphs, God is with us and our

recognition of that allows us to share that good news. God will open our eyes to see his presence—the light of Christ—in each and every one of us, so that we see his movement in the midst of our daily lives. Second, we should recognize that God works in community. The revelation of Jesus’s identity on the holy mountain of the Transfiguration happened in the presence of the community of saints, Moses and Elijah, in a moment when the triune God was revealed—three natures in one, a community in God’s self. From that, we should be inspired to take God’s presence within us out into the world to transform it. Immediately after the Transfiguration, a crowd of people met Jesus and his disciples. They begged Jesus to look at a young boy plagued with demons that made him have convulsions. When the disciples were unable to cast out the demon, Jesus stepped in and healed the a boy among the crowd of people. God was doing God’s work in the midst of community. Finally, the Transfiguration should remind us that while we are here to be the doers of God’s work in the world, we cannot do it on our own, we need to rely on God’s grace, mercy, and power to give us the desire, strength, and endurance to do it. Peter hinted at this in his letter when he said that “no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

The Transfiguration is about transformation; it is about humanity having a glimpse of the divine in Jesus Christ. It is about the glory of God, himself a community in the Trinity, being revealed to us, God’s community, and instructing us to share his glory with others. Christ in his transfigured glory is our focus. Transforming lives is our goal. Jesus went from the summit of Mt. Tabor to its foothills in order to show God’s glory in healing a convulsing boy. We are to listen to him and from our own transformation by knowing the transfigured and resurrected Lord, we show the world that humans can do better, be better, and survive. We can show how humans can indeed be loving, respectful, sincere, and examples of God’s image. We’re supposed to be here for each other. We’re supposed to be our sisters’ and our brothers’ keeper. We *are* a family—the human family, and we must stick together, helping each other see God’s glory revealed in each other’s lives. Amen.

#### Resource

Cláudio Carvalhaes, “Commentary on Luke 9:28-36, (37-43)” in *The Working Preacher*, [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2756](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2756).

<http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/transfiguration-c-worship-transfigured/>