

The Feast of the Transfiguration

Year A

Be Transfigured

[RCL] Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Luke 9:28-36

We should be observing the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost today, but this year, there is a break in the pattern. Today is the Feast of the Transfiguration, which always falls on August 6th, and this Feast outranks Pentecost 9. In fact, there are only a handful of feast days so important that they take precedence over a Sunday, and all of them are feasts related to Jesus himself. Today we commemorate how Jesus was transfigured before his closest disciples, Peter, John, and James—how his glory was revealed in dazzling white light, and how God’s voice proclaimed, “This is my Son, my Chosen: listen to him!”

“Transfigure” is not a word often used in conversation nowadays. We might use “transform” or “alter” instead, or even “change.” There is an interesting question with the Feast of the Transfiguration: who is it that’s really being changed in this story? Jesus appears to be changed. Luke writes “the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.” But the truth is, Jesus only looks different to his disciples. It is Peter, John, and James who are really transfigured, their eyes now open to see Jesus as he really is, clothed in light and revealed as the Son of God. And the disciples’ lives are changed too, after this experience of God’s presence: before, they thought they were following a remarkable teacher; after, they know their lives are being woven into God’s plan for the transfiguration of the world.

What experiences in your life frame the way you see and understand the world? Much of the way we experience the world is fixed by circumstances beyond our control: who our parents are, where we are from, the language we speak. But sometimes we have moments of clarity which allow us to see the world in a new light, from a bird's-eye view. These are moments when it seems we can see beyond ourselves and our limitations, into the heart of reality. When you have this kind of experience, you can be fairly certain it’s because you have been in the presence of God. Transfiguration is a natural consequence of being in God’s presence.

Jesus took his disciples up on the mountain hoping to find God there. They were on a quest, actively seeking God’s presence. Like Peter and John and James, God is calling all of us to climb the mountain with Jesus. Jesus leads his disciples up there because he knows that’s where God lives. The same is true for Moses in the reading from Exodus — God is found on the mountaintop, where your vision is clear and all the noise of everyday life subsides.

But even though it is easier to find God on the mountaintop, that is not the only place God can be found. All of us came to church this morning, hoping to find something of God here. And God feels especially close in the beauty of the natural world: stars shining in the sky, waves falling on

the ocean shore. Poets and visionaries can attest that these are places you can find God. When you're lost or lonely or wondering what's next, find a church to pray in, or a mountain to climb, or a forest to walk in — remember those places you have felt God's presence before and go seek God there again.

Of course, there's always a temptation to stay put on top of the mountain — to use that sacred space as a place to hide from the problems of the world. Peter — bumbling Peter, as usual — gives into this temptation when he asks Jesus if they can build dwellings on top of the mountain and just bask in God's glorious presence forever, content, but removed from all the trouble brewing down on the ground below. The answer is no. God needs us to go down from the mountain and out into the world, and take some of God's transformative love with us to share.

Truthfully, it isn't only in those beautiful and set-apart places that we can find God. The whole world is filled with the glory of God, if we only have eyes to see. John Neafsey, in his book *A Sacred Voice is Calling*, writes that the most important place we can hear God's voice is in the cry of the poor. Neafsey means that eventually, we have to go where we know God is. And we know that God is always alive in the struggle for justice. We know that God lives among the marginalized, that God fights for the poor and upholds the weak. This is another place to seek God's presence, and to hear God's voice in the story they tell. And from listening, to learn how best we can share God's love with one another, and see unity where we thought there was division.

There is no place on earth that God's love does not go. If we open our hearts to God's Spirit and go looking for God, we will begin to see God's presence all around us. Our transfiguration comes as our eyes are opened and our hearts changed. And the people who seemed so different from us before — the poor and the marginalized — we will see them as they really are: made in God's image, just as we are; we will see how Jesus' life was spent for them, just as it was for us.

Open your eyes and see the world as it is— beloved by God. Let your heart be transfigured by God's love. Take that love down from this mountain and use it to bring more love into the world.

Amen.

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