

Transfiguration of Our Lord, February 11, 2024  
“Letting Christ Shine” (Mark 9:2-9)

Today is the last Sunday of Epiphany, And once again we travel with Jesus and the three disciples to the top of a mountain. We know the story well. While on the mountain, Mark tells us that Jesus begins to glow and is transfigured before their eyes. His clothes become dazzling white – whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them.

But what does all this mean? How are we, 2,000 years removed from this event, to make sense of today’s text? To do so, we must first understand the terminology used. Consulting my dictionary, I found that *transfigured* means: A) to alter the outward appearance of; to transform; B) to exalt or glorify. Using this definition, I think we can say that the experience of transfiguration is something with which we are all familiar. It’s something we witness at various times in our lives.

For example, all of us are familiar with the way in which many women when pregnant have a sort of glow to their skin and to their expressions. Despite the physical discomfort, the morning sickness, and all the rest, there is something in the physical fact of pregnancy that transfigures or transforms many women who are pregnant. Another kind of transfiguration can come at the end of a rain storm. Where all had previously been dark, the clouds break away so that we might see a rainbow or the beauty of the clouds transfigured by a shaft of light cutting through them. We also see faces transfigured by relief or joy after a time of trouble, crisis or pain has passed away.

So, what we see, then, is that transfiguration is really some aspect of reality which we do not normally see, some quality which is most often either hidden or under control. Transfiguration doesn’t normally add something which isn’t there. It simply brings to light that quality or characteristic which is already present, but not always seen.

In the gospel description of the Transfiguration, we have such a bringing to light, and what is brought to light is Jesus’ divinity. Of course, the disciples had seen glimpses of Jesus’ divinity before: he had healed people and cast out demons, he had walked on water and calmed the storm, he had fed thousands with one packed lunch. Yet, even though they have had all these experiences with him, Mark portrays them as still unsure of who Jesus is. And it is now late in his ministry.

This event takes place just before Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem and those who are plotting his death. Could he go to the cross with these disciples still not knowing his true identity? Is this mountaintop event one final attempt by God to show them who Jesus is?

Let’s go back to the story for a moment. While Jesus is praying, Mark tells us, that his whole being is filled with light. Standing with him are Moses, the great law giver, and Elijah, one of the great Old Testament prophets. Here are the two bases of the Jewish faith, and they are standing with Jesus. Peter is now beginning to see more clearly. Things are starting to click. His suggestion of building three shrines – one each for Moses, Elijah and Jesus – tells us that he now understands Jesus to be equally important as the Law and the Prophets. However, as soon as he reaches this conclusion, he and the other two are immediately told that Jesus is much more – that he’s even greater than the law and the prophets. From the cloud overshadowing Jesus comes

a voice telling them that he is indeed the Son of God, the Beloved, the One who is to be listened to and heard.

Therefore, this event meets our definition of transfiguration. Jesus' outward appearance is changed or transformed AND he is exalted as being one with God – namely God's beloved Son. And through this event, Jesus' divinity – which the disciples have failed to fully see – is revealed through a tremendous light show, the likes of which they've never witnessed before. This light shows them who Jesus is.

Now, let's step back and think again about light in Biblical history. Recall, first of all, how after Moses went into the presence of God, his face shown with such light that the Jews were terrified, so terrified that Moses had to wear a veil after his encounter with God until the light wore off. And then there was Isaiah who, in the temple, saw only the edges of God's presence, and immediately became aware of his sinfulness and the need for God's mercy. Having seen only the fringes of God, he had declared that no one could see the awesome holiness of God and not be destroyed.

So, for the disciples, this transfiguration which made Jesus so white that nothing on earth could have produced that light, along with the presence of Moses and Elijah and the voice from the cloud identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of the law and prophets, confirmed for them Jesus' identity. It revealed something they had not previously seen, namely the holiness and awesomeness of one who had been in their midst all along.

And then, suddenly, it was over, and everything was back to normal. Or was it? We, who live on this side of the cross, know that what was to come for Jesus and his disciples was anything but normal; but it was Jesus' mission and the reason for his coming. So, immediately after the transfiguration, Jesus began walking toward Jerusalem, toward his death, toward the cup he prayed he would not have to drink, but a cup he would willingly accept if it was his Father's will.

Now, let's think about what is going on here. Jesus has just been declared as the Son of God, the Beloved, And suddenly, he and the disciples are back in the everyday world with the regular, everyday things to do. For Jesus – and for the disciples – they were back in the way of the cross. We can say, then, that even though the transfiguration may have changed the disciples' understanding of Jesus, and even though it may have confirmed their faith, it never took them – or Jesus – out of the real world in which they lived.

Oh yes, they were surely confused by this event, and it probably didn't become completely clear until they came to know Jesus as their risen Lord, but then they would know, without a doubt, that he was God's Son. And that's when their job really began. They were called to proclaim the resurrection of the Son of God in the real world, the world in which they lived, and, certainly, having experienced this transfiguration event made a tremendous difference in how they went about that.

And so it is with us. We, too, have in some sense seen Christ transfigured. We have met him at different places on our journey and felt the holiness of being in his presence. We have been fed by him – as we will again today in his holy meal. And we have been healed by him. Just as we

have seen a woman transfigured by her pregnancy, or the end of a storm transfigured by the return of light, we have seen Christ's majesty at some time and place in our lives; and we shall never be the same. We have, if you will, *seen the light* – if only for a moment – and we are different for all time.

Yes, we still live in the real world, we still have the way of the cross to walk in our lives; but having been given the grace of the light – Christ's light – our lives, too, are transformed, even more so when we let his light shine through us. It is, of course, easy to let his light shine when we're having mountaintop experiences – when things are going well and we can feel the power of his presence – but it is in our everyday lives when we're walking the way of the cross that we really need to let it shine so others can receive the light just as we have.

This is not a task without frustrations and failures, but it is what we are called to do. And this task, this calling, becomes easier when we continually seek the light in our own lives, when we strive to be in the presence of the holy, if only for a moment at a time. His light will not only give us both the direction and strength to follow in the way of the cross, but will help us to let his light shine so that others may be transfigured or transformed by his love, his presence, his holiness. May we shine our lights shine for Jesus. It will make all the difference. Amen.