

## **Transfiguration of The Others (CB)**

So one of my very favourite things to do as I prepare to write a sermon on Fridays is to peruse what other ministers or theologians say about the particular topic or scripture I am writing about. It is always wonderful to get some affirmation on the way I view a scripture or a theme that I am wrestling with. But often times as I peruse the writings of other ministers or theologians I don't receive affirmation, I receive an idea or theory that challenges my own. It's quite neat....

Today is transfiguration Sunday and we often tell the story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountaintops as he went praying with his closest friends. It's a mainstay event in our biblical experience, Jesus' physical appearance changing before the eyes of his companions, and prophets of the past and also God making appearances to support Jesus before he begins the most dramatic event of his life.

But there is one take on the transfiguration that awed me, and which I wish to share with you. This theory comes from a Louisiana Episcopal minister Rev. Roger Townsend Hartline. What if all this time we have been looking at the transfiguration wrong? What if it was the disciples who were transfigured and not Jesus?

The scripture: About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus.

And we recall the part where Peter, Mr. Fixit, being overwhelmed – and apparently babbling – suggested that they build three tents, for the three of them. And then out of a hovering cloud came a booming voice! God was with them, “this is my beloved Son, hear him”!

So when we think of transfiguration we think of transformation. We think change. And if we are to think of Jesus Christ as God incarnate, there's an issue that is being posed here when we think of God and change in the same sentence.

There are many scriptures which address God's unchangeable nature. From Psalm 102:25-27: 'Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.'

From James 1:17: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.' And a more familiar one from Hebrews 13:8 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.'

So Jesus probably looked a little different on the mountaintop that day, but is the word 'transfigure' really what we want to be using to describe the event? What if we were to approach this from a different angle?

You see, perhaps this is a very misunderstood story. We THINK it's about Jesus. But what if it really isn't? What if the story really is about Peter and John and James. The story said that Jesus' appearance changed, but what if the real change here was the perception of Peter, James and John?. That They were the ones who were transfigured on the mountain.

Probably makes you wonder, well what does that even mean...

Rev. Hartline explains: 'You see, the Fathers of the Church understood the real impact of the story of the Transfiguration. It is about Grace and its effect on our lives.' It was by the operation of Grace that the disciples Peter, John and James were able to see Christ in a new and deeper reality.'

Peter James and John on that mountaintop that day experienced Jesus in a whole different way that they hadn't before. Think

about it.... They had seen Jesus heal and preach and so minor and major miracles, and although they were aware of his connection to God, they hadn't quite seen it like this.

Jesus looked different, inhuman perhaps, then prophets of old showed up in council with him, the prophets they had heard about and read about all their lives, giants of their culture and religion... and to top it all off.... God himself made an appearance.

What a thing for them to experience... what grace was offered to them that day... that would change the thoughts, or transform the mind, or transfigure the heart... of anyone... so yes... it is not going out on a limb to say that perhaps the real transfiguration was that of Peter, James and John that day. Grace had transformed or transfigured them.

Their experience on the mountain that day was a mind changer, and heart changer and a game changer. Their concept of Jesus had just gone into overdrive. And this would enable them to grasp what Jesus was going to do right after they descended that mountain. Don't forget Jesus left that mountaintop and headed to Calvary, to fulfill the pinnacle of his human existence and to lay a path for our eternity..

Peter, James and John experienced such grace that day, and that same grace is being offered to us as well. One way of that offering comes through being a part of the Church. The church functions as a repository of Grace, and when we are a part of it WE are offered that same mountainside view of Christ today.

In Baptism for example, we receive Grace, and while, other than having wet hair, there is no real external transformation. But certainly, there is a wondrous and inexplicable inward transfiguration, even as infants...

And this opportunity for transfiguration happens over and over again in our lives in the church. I think it happens every time we participate in the Lord's supper. It's one of the reasons that feast is so vital to our Faith. Before we partake we ask God to

transform the elements we are about to partake, and to transform us in the process so that we may know his love, and through our transformation we will be able to transform our world all around us. This is the beauty and power of our church rituals. They are meant to be deeply meaningful and transformative.

Peter, James and John's hearts and minds were transfigured on the mountaintop that day, and they went on to journey with Jesus as he went to the cross. What an epic transformational experience it must have been... Peter for one... We remember that it is through his work after Jesus' ascension that we have our Holy church..

This Holy Church, in which, all of us get to experience both spiritual birth and spiritual growth. And this happens through the grace of God, that same grace which the disciples encountered that day on the mountaintop with Jesus. This grace that facilitates our own transfigurations time after time...

Have you recognized scenarios in which you have been transfigured or transformed or changed? For instance, when you have your first child, and people often say that they will change the way you see the world... having a child changes your world forever doesn't it? Your life, your heart, your outlook are forever transformed, things could never be the same again... then you have grandchildren....

How about spiritual transfiguration? When have you experienced that? How had it impacted your life, the way you feel God and see others?

God's grace continually provides opportunities for us to transfigure, to transform to change, Our lord tells us in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, "My Grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness".

Its really amazing to contemplate that in OUR weakness the Strength of God is made perfect. Now THAT'S a transfiguration.

And its also the meaning behind our celebration of the Transfiguration of Christ. It's why we are able to look at not his being transformed on the mountain, but the rest of us. Peter, James, John, Us.... – it is the power of his Grace changing, transforming, transfiguring Us.  
Thanks be to God. Amen....

### **Prayers** (Christine Jarrett)

God of glory, you took your friends with you when you went to pray on the mountain. You revealed to them the glory of Jesus, your beloved Son, on his way to the cross.

We do not live on mountaintops, but we, too, would glimpse your glory in the ordinary days of our lives, and in the community of your Son in which you have chosen to dwell. We look for you among people who have no power no rights no voice.

We look for you among those who live on the streets of our city, whose housing is inadequate, whose homes are not safe. We look for you among those who grieve a past that is no more and fear a future that seems full of loss.

We look to your grace to be bestowed upon your church, the wider church our United Church of Canada, our Region, our City and our church here and it's members... we pray especially for our shutins... we pray for those in our hearts....

God who meets us in the broken places, shine the light of Christ deep into our lives, so we may carry that light into dark places and point to the One whose brokenness is our salvation.

### **Benediction**

In the coming week,  
may you experience the grace of God with Joy.  
May the holy cloud comfort you.  
May the divine voice encourage you.

May the power of the Spirit transform you,  
transform us,  
transform our world. Amen.