

Sermon ✝ February 14, 2021  
Frank Maxwell

We work all year long; sometimes 50 or even 51 straight weeks. We get up every morning . . . go to work . . . come home in the evening . . . eight hours a day . . . 40 hours a week . . . 2,000 hours a year. We work for an entire year so that we can be rewarded by that entity known as vacation time. For many, that week or two of vacation is worth all of the time spent working throughout the rest of the year. And what we do on our vacation is as varied as all of the vacations that are taken each year.

For the first 30 years of my life, we spent most of our vacation time at a small log cabin on South Twin Lake in Conover, Wisconsin. We looked forward to being there all year long . . . especially this time of the year . . . the cold, snowy time of the year when our thoughts begin to drift toward the warm months of summer.

The time spent at the cabin was very special time. It was time for relaxation and for family and special friends. It was a time for renewal. And somewhere, usually towards the end of the summer, I would find myself drifting on the lake on a warm afternoon, my fishing pole carelessly lying on my lap. And in that moment of total peace and serenity, I would tell myself that life should always be just like that and I'd wish there were some way to hold onto that moment forever.

Of course, I knew better. I knew that life wasn't that simple. But the day dream was always enjoyable.

The Transfiguration is kind of a similar story. A few of Jesus' disciples are witnesses to an amazing event. They sense the serenity of the moment and Peter decides that they should try to capture that moment forever. In reality, Peter probably knew better. He probably knew that life wasn't that simple. But the day dream was enjoyable. The question for today is what is the significance of this story . . . this event called the Transfiguration.

For most of us, this is a familiar story. Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a high mountain. And he was transfigured before them. Elijah and Moses appear. Not really knowing what to say, Peter blurts out, "*Why don't we make three shelters for you guys.*"

Next "a cloud overshadowed them". And from the cloud a voice speaks, "*This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!*" And then, in an instant, Moses and Elijah are gone.

Whoa! What just happened? Was it a dream? Was it magic? Was it psychological? Was it bad pita bread from the night before?

Sometimes, we ask too many questions. Sometimes, we want too many answers. Sometimes we forget: with God all things are possible.

No matter what think, for Mark and Peter and James and John, the vision was real. God proclaimed Jesus as his son. There was something special about him.

For early Christians, for the disciples, this was a preview of the days ahead. You are traveling with someone special and don't you forget it. It was a dramatic declaration of the uniqueness of Jesus.

It's like the lady who stopped by a tennis club to watch her daughter, Kelly, practice. Sitting high in the bleachers, the interested mother watched as her daughter was engaged in a hard-fought game of tennis. At one point in the match, a lady sitting behind the mother leaned forward and said, *"My! That little girl with the red hair and freckles can really play good tennis, can't she?"* The mother swelled with pride as she replied, *"That's my girl! That's my daughter, Kelly!"* In the story of the Transfiguration event, God says of Jesus, *"That's my boy! That's my Son!"*

This scripture also reminds us of the rhythmic pattern of Jesus' life: work and prayer; involvement and then withdrawal.

In some ways, this lesson complements last week's gospel where Jesus gets up early in the morning and goes off to pray. Once again, in today's lesson, he affirms the need for withdrawal.

Withdrawal is important. It offers distance and allows time for reflection, meditation, introspection, self-evaluation. The withdrawals of Jesus were not sustained. He withdrew only to return.

And it is important to return. There is work to be done; friendships to be sustained; faith to live.

In one of her children's books, Catherine Marshall tells the story of *"The Boy with the Shining Face."* Four children from an Indian village in the far west attempt to climb a towering mountain. They are to report back to the chief and bring a twig from the place where he or she turned back. The first child brings back a cactus leaf, and the chief knows that it is from the base of the mountain since it is a desert flower.

The next child comes with a cottonwood twig, showing that she made it half way up the mountain to the springs. The third child brings a pine twig from three-fourths the way up the mountain. Finally, the last child returned. Although his hands were empty, his face was shining. Now the old chief's face glowed too.

*"I knew it! When I looked at your face, I knew it.... You have been to the top. You needed no twig to tell me. It is written in your eyes. You alone, my boy, have seen the glory and the peace of the mountain."*

Catherine Marshall concludes: *"You know, the very same thing happens to you and me when we have been with God and talked to God in prayer and felt a holy presence in our hearts. It shows on our faces. It shines in our eyes. We don't have to tell anyone. Other people will see it and know and be glad."*

To be transfigured and transformed by the power of God is not something we can understand or explain or make happen.

Instead it is something that happens to us, if we open up and pay attention, if we condition ourselves

to climb the mountain, if we take the irrational step of offering ourselves as a channel of God's grace.

In the wilderness of Lent that now stretches before us, let us take the time to be holy—time to become faces of holiness for others.

May it be so, for you and for me. Amen.