**February 11, 2018; Transfiguration**

**Mark 9:2-9; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

Today is the day in the church year when we commemorate Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountaintop. Even though this story is familiar to most readers, it is still confounding. Like Peter, we don’t know what to do with this story. There is glory. A lot of glory. There are visiting spiritual dignitaries (which in itself is a unique biblical experience). There was a disembodied voice, a fumbled attempt to worship, and Jesus’ common refrain: “mum’s the word.” Jesus *himself* didn’t want to talk about it. So what should we make of it? How shall we respond?

There are two key points about the Transfiguration. First, this was a rare glimpse of our Savior, Jesus Christ, both fully human and fully divine. He literally shone with glory. (He could have been a Tide commercial.) God spoke from the heavens, as he did at Christ’s baptism, that this indeed, was God’s Son. He was beloved. He was to be trusted and listened to. But this was also the everyday Rabbi Jesus whom the disciples knew, who didn’t shine with glory, but was humble and cryptic and always on the go. Jesus didn’t throw a party for himself up there, nor did he encourage Peter’s offer for a bigger celebration with Elijah and Moses. He took the moment for what it was, then got back to work. The disciples, the scribes and Pharisees, the Roman leaders – they all spent Jesus’ ministry trying to determine if he was either God or man. Different situations pointed to one identity or the other, but this Transfiguration showed him as fully God and fully man.

The second point about the Transfiguration is that it embodies our own journey as Christians. Our lives on earth are certainly fully human. The Gospels and Paul’s letters promise that despite our sinfulness and mortality, we are united in our baptism with Christ’s baptism, and thus will also be united with Christ’s resurrection.[[1]](#footnote-1) Through faith, with God’s grace, we will be transformed from sinful to cleansed and forgiven. We will be transfigured into the good creatures God intended. Our lives are then spent in pursuit of this transfiguration, ever hoping for the day when we will shine with God’s glory.

As a baby grows into a toddler, and that toddler grows into a solid child, there are moments when we look at them and suddenly see them changed. Something imperceptible shifts, so that their face suddenly looks older, their words convey a new sense of maturity, or their body moves in a different way than it did before. Of course, they have the same spirit and personality, but suddenly they have a different kind of body. They are transfigured. Glowing with a new sense of being.

Sometimes a transfiguration happens after a significant event in someone’s life. A major stress or transformative joy somehow changes the way a person’s spirit lives within their bodies. And then, after death, our bodies are completely transfigured. If you are blessed to be with someone in the moment of death, you can watch the change happen. With one moment they have life and breath and color, and the next moment it is as though you have found a large shell on the beach, empty of its former occupant. Without a living being inhabiting the body, our skin and bones clearly become distinctive (and even different) from who we were. Our identity – our spirit and dreams and experiences – are suddenly and clearly separate from the body which we carried through life. To such an extent that some people are unrecognizable after their deaths. The joy that you used to see sparkle in their eyes – the very essence of that person – was the thing that you knew. The way that they held their mouth or their shoulders, all of the things that let you know that this was the person you loved – after it disappears, so does the person that you loved. They are transfigured into a new way of being, away from our sight. (Richard Strauss composed a tone poem -- “Death and Transfiguration” – that melodically illustrated this final human journey in 4 musical movements.)

Transfigurations happen in our lives, though they are rare and fleeting moments, just as it was for Jesus on the mountaintop. Jesus’ transfiguration reminds us to be on the lookout for God’s glory around us. It is not just in a world far away, on a mountaintop too far to reach. God’s glory is in the world that God made and it has been placed in us. According to Frederick Dale Bruner, "The purpose of our lives is to remove the veil from the Father's face, and to display something of God's glory to the world." It is in a simple meal of bread and wine. It is in a humble service of feeding and clothing someone in need. It is with the family that sits with a mother who prepares to die. They will go home and find that home is no longer filled with ordinary things, but instead filled with sacramental things – the coffee and the oatmeal and her favorite sweater all becoming holy objects. [[2]](#footnote-2)

Just as the disciples stepped away from their everyday work with Christ, and went up the mountaintop to see the Transfiguration, we, too, can see things differently after a change of view. Looking from another angle (literally), we find the puzzle piece for which we had been searching. Thinking about a situation after a night’s sleep, we realize the resolution we need. Considering a political idea after meeting someone with a different perspective or reading a new book, we find ourselves open to something that we previously wouldn’t believe or accept. Perhaps after a change of view, we see things as they really are.

C. S. Lewis wrote The Great Divorce, one of the great parables about a change of view, transfiguration and transformation. It begins with a man who is visiting a strange place, finds himself completely disoriented, and after seeing a bunch of people crowded at the bus stop, he, too, decides to get on the bus. As the ride goes on, he realizes that the other riders are all unpleasant, grumpy and complaining and somehow rather grey. They arrive at a beautiful, glowing countryside where they are all given the choice to stay, or return to the busy and dingy town where they had been. The bus riders tentatively explore the new place, but find that they are scared of its differences – the brightness hurts some of the people’s eyes, the fresh air worries some about getting sick, and the different native creatures were bewildering. So most of the bus riders returned to the bus. Nevermind that this new place was cleaner and prettier and downright, better than where they had been, they understood the other grey place and felt safe there. A few bus riders tried to take pieces of the new world back with them, but were stopped each time. One angel said, “There is no room for [that apple] in [your old home]. Stay here and learn to eat such apples.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Despite their all being freely offered this beautiful place, only a few dared to be changed and transfigured so that they might stay.

(Incidentally, if you have never read this story, I commend it to you. Go to the library today. Borrow a copy this week. C. S. Lewis: The Great Divorce. It is a quick read that will likely change your ideas about heaven, hell, and life on earth.)

It may be tempting to read this story of Jesus’ Transfiguration and think “how wonderful” and “how glorious!” And it was. But don’t overlook the line about Peter being terrified. Transformation seems so wonderful, but it is also scary. So much so that we tend to avoid it. Like C. S. Lewis’s bus riders, we stay away from decisions that will change us. We decline new jobs that require a move. We won’t read new books that might change our opinion, or new habits that will change our lives.

As Christians, it is our prayer that God will transform our every day, so that one day we will be transfigured for God’s glory. We need to be transfigured. We **depend** on the transfiguration to come. For us to honestly, and with any integrity, pursue that transfiguration, we pray that God would transform our hearts and minds, our worries and joys into something that would glorify Jesus. For we should not be *waiting* for some day to come when we might finally live up to our potential, or finally fulfill our baptism with our death; NO! Let today be that day when our everyday worries be transfigured into something that we would not recognize. For Sweet Hollow, perhaps our anxieties and questions about money and membership, volunteers and kids might be transfigured into simple hope and trust. Perhaps we would finally know that this is not actually our church, but the church of Jesus Christ, and because of *that,* all will be well.

God’s glory is present each day. Each of us, and our Sweet Hollow community are daily witnesses of God’s glory. Let these glimpses of the holy change us and transform us. While we pursue our ultimate transfiguration, let us not grow weary. For Christ is coming to make all things new. Thanks be to God. Amen.

1. Romans 6:1-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://day1.org/3633-daytoday_glory>, “Day 1” by Brian Cole. March 4, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lewis, C.S. The Great Divorce. Angel, page. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)