

March 3, 2019

Transfiguration – Seeing Beyond the Surface

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. Oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

Today is the last Sunday of Epiphany. This Epiphany season has been longer than most. It's just one week short of being the longest that it can be. But every Epiphany season, which is all about Jesus being revealed for who He is, the Son of God. Every Epiphany season ends with this Gospel reading, it's called the Transfiguration. It's where Jesus takes with him Peter, James, and John up the mountain. And while he is there, he is changed. It's not a transformation. He isn't changed to something that he has not been all along. He is transfigured. They can see him as he truly is. They can see beyond the surface. They see the essence of Jesus who is both human and divine.

And up to this point, the disciples see Jesus for his humanity. They see and follow him as one who is like them. Only with a deeper, richer relationship with God. They see that God has given him power, but up until this point, for the most part, they see him as human. In this moment, in this instance, Peter, James and John now see the very essence of who Jesus is. He is the Son of God, a deity. The wholeness of God has been dwelling with them; hidden behind this veil of humanity.

And even though both are very real, this is the first time that they truly understand or have an inkling of an idea of the depth of who Jesus is as God incarnate, God being present with them. And Peter is so taken by this moment in seeing Jesus as He is, that he wants to stay there. This is a mountain top experience. They have seen not only Jesus as he is, but Luke in the Gospel says that they see Moses and Elijah in their glory. They see them also as they have come from being in the presence of God.

And we have the bearer of the law, the giver of the law, Moses, and the Great Prophet Elijah. They have come to speak with Jesus, to prepare the humanity of Jesus, if you will, for what is about to take place. For now, he turns his face to Jerusalem. Now he begins the ending of his earthly ministry and the completion of bringing salvation not only to the Jews, but to all people. This is the single greatest revealing of the very essence of who Jesus is that we have throughout the scriptures. And it is the greatest Epiphany moment for the disciples. And that is why it comes at the end of the season of Epiphany. Transfiguration is an important thing. It is important for us to see and know and understand who Jesus truly is. Certainly, we stand on the other side of the resurrection. We have a knowledge. We have a greater understanding of what Jesus was accomplishing than the disciples did. We have an understanding and a belief and a trust that Jesus is with God still in heaven. The humanity of Jesus at the right hand of the divinity.

But every one of us needs an Epiphany moment. Every one of us needs that moment of seeing transfigured where he's no longer simply, you know, me and Jesus, we're good buddy kind of things. Jesus taught some good things and he cared for sinners and he talked about forgiveness. And those are all good things. There's the moment that each of us needs to have that we understand where Jesus is revealed to us in the very essence of who he is as Son of God, as savior of the world. And that's something that most Christians that I've encountered have difficulties with.

We like to think of Jesus as Lord. We like to think of him as teacher. We like to think of him as one who has given us parables so that we can understand the living of our life a little bit better. So, we can feel a little better about our living out of our lives. Because Jesus' parables often talked about people who were imperfect. And He often talked about them being forgiven and received again. And we like that. We want that for ourselves.

But sometimes we don't quite make that step of understanding that we don't just want Jesus in our lives. We absolutely need Jesus in our lives as a savior. We must come to that point in our lives where we are transfigured. Where we are becoming the children of God that we are called to be and that we begin our journey in baptism. We need that moment when we can fall on our knees and say to God, I know that I can't do this on my own. I know that no matter what I do, no matter how hard I try, no matter how good I think I'm doing, no matter how I compare to my neighbor over here or my neighbor over there, I am a broken and sinful individual.

I have not loved you with my whole heart, soul, and mind. I have not loved my neighbor as myself, especially as you dear Lord have told us what neighbor is, defined neighbor for us. I know that I lack in that, I don't treat the people around me with the dignity and justice and respect that they deserve and that I expect for myself.

We all need that moment where we can say, I give up. I want to be good. I want to be your child. I want to reflect your glory in the world. I want to be glorified like Moses and Elijah were found in their glory. But I know that's not here and that's not now. I know that I need forgiveness from God. I know that I need forgiveness from people around me. And that's a transfiguring moment. It's a moment where we begin to step back a little bit and allow the spirit of God that is in us to begin to shine through. It makes us more aware of how we are living our lives and what we are presenting to the world when we say that I'm a Christian or that I am an Episcopalian. How we live our lives, how we speak to one another, how we give ourselves to one another, how we withhold ourselves from one another, all speaks to what we believe about God and Jesus Christ.

It all speaks to the people around us about the authenticity of being a Christian. And the more that we can step back and allow the Spirit of God to lead us in the things that we say and the things that we do. That lead us to reach beyond ourselves, to recognize the blessings that we have received, and the fear being taken away so that we can choose to offer, to share our blessings with those in need. Those are the transfiguring moments where people are beginning

to see in us the same thing that the disciples saw in Jesus on that mountain. To see that God is alive, to see that God is true, to see that God's promises are fulfilled.

It is through our actions as we reach out and it's through our words as we speak gently to one another. Or we speak out in help of those who do not receive the justice that they deserve. It's about standing up for the rights of every human being and respecting the dignity of every human being. It's about living out our baptismal covenant, the promises that we have made to God. Which lead us not only to honor God in word and deed, but to honor all of God's children, all the people of God's creation.

And we do that in our own lives. We do that in the life of the church, of each congregation. Yesterday the vestry spent a good many hours talking about us as individuals and what brought us to this place. What brought us to this belief. But we also talked about what it is to be Saint Jude's. What it is that we must share, what it is to recognize the divisions and hurts in our community. And what it is to begin to explore ways of providing mission and ministry to help with the divisions and the hurts of our community. To not turn a blind eye to the poverty that is around us or the drug use that is around us, to the lives that are being broken around us. We had a really, truly excellent conversation about the veterans among us who suffer because of their time in war and how we can begin to respond and include and welcome them. Even if that means, or maybe especially if that means they're relying on service animals to help them just to live day by day in the world that we take for granted.

It is for us as a congregation to be transfigured, as well as everyone, to peel back the layers of our humanity and fear and to glow with the presence of God. To show what it is to be in the presence of God, to be merciful, to be just, to be loving, to be caring, to recognize the broken among us, to reach out, to lift up.

Those are the things that we are trying to focus on as a community of faith in times when so many things are being questioned. When so many things in the world around us seem to be broken and there seems to be very little hope that things are going to get better. The church is that place where we say God makes all things better. And we as God's children, as we allow God to shine through us, we can help make life for one another better. For that is the will of God and that is the hope of God. And that is the blessing of God.

The moment of transfiguration is important, was important for the disciples. They didn't immediately understand what it meant. For Peter, he wanted to stay there. Let's stay up here. This is a good place to be. It's good for us to be here. But true transfiguration is not about staying apart from the world. Many times, that transfiguring moment can take place apart from the world. But it's only as we engage with the world that we make that moment powerful, not only for ourselves, but for all people. May we recognize the transfiguring moments of each of our lives and the opportunities and the moments of transfiguring for our congregation. May we move forward with faith, move forward without fear, move forward in proclaiming the love of God for all people and embrace those who hear that word and come to hear more.