

Year B, Last Sunday after the Epiphany
February 14, 2021
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“And He was Transfigured before them...,”

Today is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany. That sounds ominous. What we are is on the threshold of Lent. Lent is my favorite season of the liturgical year; I can really get my church on. Inwardly, I find energy in the season; the traditions, the call to observance, the extra devotions we *get* to do (like the Great Litany, the Penitential Order of Mass, the Angelus at Morning Prayer. All the good stuff). And outwardly, yes, I am a priest... an Anglican Priest, meaning I still hold my religious cards closer to my chest than I should. But not in Lent. No one bats an eye if you claim a religious impulse during Lent, priest or not.

We’ve all had to give up a lot this year, a whole lot, so maybe a fast is not striking you as an appropriate Lenten devotion. We do, though, most of us, have extra time on our hands. I encourage taking on a discipline for Lent. Say Compline. Join us for Morning Prayer Wednesday – Saturday at 8:45 or Wednesday Seekers starting the 24th. Exercise with God on your mind. Read something. Donate to a local charity. I have never known anyone say, at the end of Lent, “I wish I hadn’t wasted all that time praying.” Just saying...

But before we slip (or skip) into the wonderous world of Lenten disciplines, we mustn’t skip over this threshold we are on today. Today the lectionary has us join the disciples on the mountain and are given this vision of a Transfigured Christ. We get a glimpse of God in Christ’s full glory. In St. Mark’s narrative trajectory, in the story itself, this is when we cross from Jesus’ mission among us, all the walking around healing, preaching, teaching, exorcisms and feeding, all that good stuff, to Jerusalem. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you...” From here on out, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem, the Cross. And by that Cross, to His glory. It is an important moment, an important threshold in the life of our Lord.

To get the import of this moment, it is helpful to think about this from the perspective of the disciples, because for them, His contemporaries, this was a shocking. Jesus, their rabbi and friend, was Transfigured. Do you know definition of *transfigure*? “To transform into something more beautiful or elevated, especially spiritually.” That happened before their eyes in this story. Healings are one thing, but being bleached whiter than earthly possible, drawing Moses and Elijah to His side and then God’s voice echoing on the mountain top??? Can you imagine?

Well, actually we can. We know Jesus in context of the Resurrection. We know that He was God's Son, God's Chosen. We know how the story ends. They, His friends, did not, not as surely as we do with 2000 years of history, of our own lifetimes' of Jesus' presence behind our faith. The disciples knew Jesus as a man, an extraordinary man, they had been with Him, knew what He could do, but to the human eye, He was simply a man. And actually, there were a lot of people doing pretty extraordinary things in those days. There are many stories of prophets and healers and miracle workers in first century Palestine. Now yes, Jesus had told them that the Son of Man would suffer and rise in glory and all of that, but there is a big difference between being told about something and knowing something for yourself, a big difference between hearing something for the first time, (imagine being the first ones to hear about Jesus?) there is a big difference between that and being born into a religious tradition with thousands of years of history, and culture and faith behind it, supporting us in our own belief and unbelief. It was a shocking moment, and Jesus recognizes this by yet again, silencing His followers. He told them to tell no one until *after* He had been raised. Why? Because no one would believe them, no one would believe that the Glory of God shone round about them spoke to them, and Moses and Elijah appeared. Who would believe them? Would you?

This story is important: the Transfiguration happened. In and of itself, this story is important. It is an account of how our spiritual ancestors witnessed Jesus in life. We have been remembering this story for 2000 years, because in it we learn about Jesus Christ, about how He reveals Himself to us, about His relationship to God and through that relationship, we learn about our very God's Holy nature. This story is important.

Biblical stories such as these can also inform us about the nature of the world. In them we learn about the world, God's relationship to the world, about what the world means. We learn about our place, our purpose in the ebb and flow of God's breath that has spread across the deep since the beginning of Time. In these stories, we can learn to be like Christ, to be like His disciples, and seem Him and the world as He would have us see Himself and the world.

The Transfiguration was this threshold moment, a moment where a vision of reality, of what the fullness of time would bring. In this case, in this moment, Peter, James and John witnessed the transfigured Jesus, they glimpsed the fully Divine nature of Jesus Christ, the fullness of the truth about Him, the fullness of the truth about the world. On this threshold, in this moment, they experienced the world in its fullness, and everything began to change.

So there was the Transfiguration, this vital threshold moment in the life of Jesus Christ where everything began to change. And maybe one of the lessons here is that there are thresholds that we encounter in our lives, moments where, in hindsight, we see it as the moment when everything began to change. In our lives, maybe we encounter signs, events, or something happens and we get a glimpse of what the future will bring. Perhaps it is a moment of prescience, of seeing in your mind's eye a chain of events leading from right now to sometime distant. Maybe we even have visions of transfiguration, where we see something transform, or see that it can or will transform into something more beautiful, more spiritually elevated.

Have you had a moment like that in your life, moment where everything changed because of that moment? Of course you have. That chance meeting that led to a life together. That yes to this job, this field, this school, not the other options. That decision to drive after that last drink. So many moments where had we chosen another path, how could our path, our life not be different?

And there are moments in our shared life together. What if you had chosen a different priest fifteen months ago? (Shove Tuesday, this Tuesday, is my first anniversary of ministry with you all). Or maybe it is broader. Was the last county commissioner's meeting, where the fruits of a vibrant democracy resulted in public pressure on an elected official which caused him to recant a bad decision and reverse a bad policy. Was that the first day of a new way right here in Hancock County?

Or the siege on the capitol. We are in the middle of this trial, and we've seen so much footage of the horror of that day. Have we seen a vision of our future in that footage? Which one? Civil war? Violence as a staple of American politics? Politicians deciding to take moral responsibility or act in self-interest? Or it is a vision of public servants, in this case the Capitol and DC police selflessly putting themselves between a violent mob and the US Congress? Was January 6 a threshold moment for our nation? For the world? Maybe. But how would we know?

The Transfiguration was a threshold moment with a vision of certainty. Jesus changed. Not a lot of wondering to do afterwards. Don't you wish we had that kind of certainty?

We don't have the benefit of a human Jesus to Transfigure before our very eyes, showing us "This is who I am, just wait and it will be revealed to all." But we do have generations of experience, of eternal and actual experience, sacramental experience of Jesus Christ, and of the Way the Truth and the Life He has given us. And that is no small thing. Where we don't have a brilliant Jesus transfigured before our eyes, we do have our faith, and by our faith we can know what God wants,

of how things will be in the fullness of time, the “already but not yet” assurance of our future. And that is no small thing.

The saints are emissaries, maybe more accurately visionaries of the fullness of time. They saw the full God-potential in whatever it was that they did. Whatever it was they were doing was (or could have been) a threshold after which everything would be different if we joined them. Benedict in community life; Teresa of Avila in prayer; Aquinas in ideas and so on. They saw what they did as a threshold, an occasion, maybe in a moment, maybe spread out over a life time, but they saw that in the full realization of whatever it was they were up to, whatever threshold God led them to, that Christ Himself was there in the fullness of time. That if we were all in with them, that that moment would be the time that everything changes, that everything *could* change.

But we don’t need to be saints to know fully what God demands of us, to know that if we all just, what, took it seriously, followed our consciences, accepted the truth, even if it is not in our self-interest. Well remember, the saints weren’t recognized as saints until hindsight proved they were. Because truly, each moment we live could be a threshold. Each moment could be the moment when everything changes, when everything begins to change.

Maybe it is in your own life. The moment you choose sobriety, you choose family over career, you decide that you won’t ever let him hit you again. Or maybe it is in the community, that you are going to run your business more for the common good than just personal enrichment, or you are going to run for office, or support the rights of black folks, or LGBTQ folks, or women or whom ever has less privilege than you, knowing that you might even have to share some of your unearned privilege to *their* advantage, not yours.

With every breath we take, we could be on the threshold of a wholly new world. Maybe every moment is a potential threshold, a moment where you could see the world transfigured, see a glimpse of the world as God means for it to be, that would be if we just acted like it. Imagine that, that any given moment could be the moment that everything shifts towards God. That this very moment could be the moment that everything begins to change.

As we transcend this liturgical threshold, the movement from Epiphany to Lent, remembering Jesus’ movement from life in ministry to the journey to Jerusalem, may your eyes and minds and hearts be open to the possibility that as of right now, everything might start getting better. Right now. AMEN.

