

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY B

14 February AD 2021

Mark 9:2 ff

Historical Correction

Correction. What I put in the bulletin with regard to the Transfiguration of our Lord is not entirely true. I have since learned that not all the protestant denominations observe this event in the life of Jesus with the same relish. But it has always been a special day in my mind for a number of reasons. It signals that Lent is about to begin—time for Hot Cross Buns! Depending on your pastor, there was usually a little fan-fare with putting away “alleluia” for the season of Lent. And Transfiguration has its own set of beloved hymns; *Alleluia*, *Song of Gladness*, *O Wondrous Type*, *‘Tis Good Lord to Be Here*. The commentary I read this week was written by a Methodist who set me straight; he lamented that this “Jesus event” was frequently passed over in his tradition.

Another reason I remember this day is that as a child I received a gift from Sunday school; a glow-in-the-dark Jesus. It was plastic: they were purchased in bulk for the whole Sunday school. It sat on my dresser. When the light was turned out, I could see it clearly. For some reason I associated the Transfiguration with that little glowing statuette. Jesus, watching over me.

The real Jesus

But which Jesus? This is not something I think about often. But the Bible presents us with a savior who joins us here on earth, “*becoming like us in all things except sinning.*” (Hebrews 4:15) We know he frequently washed the dirt off his feet. Mary’s son became unclean touching lepers; made mud with his own spit to heal a blind man; built a fire and roasted fish for his disciples, and finally spilled his own blood in the passion and crucifixion. We humans easily get dirty. These days, though we’ve done almost nothing, we’re told to wash our hands repeatedly; COVID germs. My shopping list has of first importance, hand soap.

In the middle of Jesus’ adventures around the Sea of Galilee, we are suddenly reminded that he is not a man, like any other, or prophet sent by God to live among us. At the Transfiguration we hear the voice of God single out Jesus as his own unique and divine Son; we heard this same voice at his baptism. “*This is my beloved Son, listen to him.*” I might remind you here that our 2021 Lenten theme points to him as well; *EYES ON JESUS*. We want

to listen to him and we want to know him. —to see the One who is truly God and truly man. He is not afraid to get dirty, but he is always holy, always divine.

Take in the Wonder

I'm told, it's not my job to explain the Transfiguration of Jesus to you. It can't be easily explained. Anything I might say could mislead you. My best response is to stand alongside you in "open-mouthed wonder at the fullness of the Christ we worship." For today we see illustrated what Paul taught in Colossians 2:9: *"In him the fullness of God dwells in bodily form."*

Some see this event as an in-between moment, one in which Jesus has one foot in heaven and the other on earth. Or, Jesus is getting ready to leave this world behind and join the glory that awaits him in heaven: a preview of the resurrection. There's a churchly in-between as well; Epiphany is over, Lent is on the doorstep—this Wednesday.



Jesus in all his glory is too overwhelming for the apostles; they fall to the ground shielding their eyes. Someone has asked, "how did they know it was Moses and Elijah?" I have no answer for that. As important an event as the Transfiguration is, it always raises more questions than gives answers.

The apostles themselves, when it happened, were dumbfounded. They propose building shrines or booths, to commemorate the event. Luke 9 tells us that Peter didn't know what else to say. I can report to you that our group did not visit the Mt. of Transfiguration; we had time limits and decided accordingly. What made the decision is that the Bible doesn't reveal the actual location where this took place. Fear not, someone has built a church in the Holy Land to commemorate the Transfiguration.

At its best the details of the Transfiguration remind us that the *"Friend we have in Jesus"* is still and always will be "the holy Other." There will always be more to Jesus than we can ever know. *"O love, how deep, how broad, how high,"* we sing, *"beyond all thought and fantasy, that God the Son of God should take our mortal form for mortal's sake."* Yes, Jesus our friend, is no one less than God. Never think you know it all. Never cease to be

amazed at his grace and his desire to forgive you. No matter what he does or says, Jesus leaves us along-side blessed Mary, “pondering the holy mysteries in our heart.”

So

On a day such as this our prayers and psalms should be exclamations of praise, proclaiming the glory of God and wonders of heaven. In our confession we ought to realize in the presence of God, if not also each other, that when we imagine God, we are often guilty of imagining him in our own image. And in doing so we have somewhat diminished the wonder and the majesty due Christ. In our minds he’s often not much more than the plastic Jesus riding in our car. Sadly, maybe that’s all we can handle—bringing Jesus along on our journey.

What if in our Lenten time, in our quiet time, in our prayer time—what if we ask Jesus to be our leader. How about asking him to take us with him, where he wants us to go? What if...? What if the sign at that church was right, “LET GO AND LET GOD.”

That’s what Peter, James and John did. When the vision was over, they followed their Lord down the mountain and to Jerusalem. Not that it was an easy journey, but they followed him to the cross and welcomed him again on Easter morning. Then, then the Transfiguration made all the sense in the world. When we embrace the crucified and risen Jesus, the journey of life will make all the sense God needs it to.

“God. grant us faith to keep our eyes on Jesus.”

Honesty compels me to admit that I am indebted to a brother or sister in Christ whose preaching notes on the Transfiguration, I read on an internet site. Whoever you are, I thank God for your wisdom, and pray that you serve God with great joy.

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