

Pastor's Message – 2/11/24  
 Mark 9:2-9      2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Transfigurations are big business today and really always have been. Think about the diet programs and gym memberships and exercise programs, the implants I mentioned a couple of weeks ago. Many people work hard and spend a lot of money to get transfigured -- a new face, a new look, a changed appearance.

Transfigurations are big business for personal reasons but also because we are very aware of the face we present to the world. And we will alter our face to our advantage if we can. Sometimes the change is not just in looks but in an individual's whole image -- including their name.

I thought we could play a little fun game today, guessing a celebrity by their given name. I'll give you their given name and you guess the celebrity.

Ready? We'll start with the easy ones.

Norma Jean Mortenson . . . . .

Edda van Heemstra Hepburn-Ruston . . . . .

Issur Danielovitch . . . . .

Winona Horowitz . . . . .

Caryn Elaine Johnson . . . . .

How about one for our younger folks?

Peter Gene Hernandez . . .

Thomas Cruise Mapother IV . . . .

One more.

Onika Tanya Maraj . . . . .

In the same way, Frances Gumm transfigured herself and her image into Judy Garland. Archibald Leach became Cary Grant. Aaron Chwatt became Red Buttons.

And would you have paid money to see Marion Morrison in the movies? Maybe, but Marion didn't take that chance, he became John Wayne.

Remember that in Holy Scriptures many people got new names to go with a new life and a new image. Abram became Abraham. Sarai became Sarah. Jacob became Israel. Saul became Paul. Not Duane Johnson, but the original: Simon became Peter, "The Rock."

Transfigurations are not the exception. They are the rule. We are all being altered in the appearance of our face, our countenance. We are all changing.

To live is to be continually transfigured.

This Sunday commemorates the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus takes his inner circle to a “high mountain” and is “transfigured” before them. It’s an amazingly terse sentence, written as though we all should know what it means. The writer does say that his clothes became “dazzling white,” but that’s it. The transfigured Jesus is met by what must have seemed like the holographic figures of Moses (Law) and Elijah (Prophets). While Jesus is in conference, Peter knocks, interrupting, wondering if the Lord would like him to build three little buildings for them. Basically, he’s babbling, because he’s scared silly (v. 6). The cloud and the voice are phenomena quite apart from the transfiguration itself. Then Moses and Elijah are gone, and they “saw no one ... but only Jesus” (v. 8). As they come down off the mountain, Jesus advises them to keep their mouths shut until after the “Son of Man had risen from the dead.” This was fine, except that they didn’t have a clue as to what Jesus was talking about. “Risen from the dead?” What’s that?

“Transfiguration” is often conflated with “transformation,” but the two words are different. To be [transfigured](#) means “to change the appearance of someone or something, especially in a way that makes them look beautiful,” while transformation means “a change into someone or something completely different,” or the process of this change.

The difference matters. Jesus’ transfiguration changes his appearance. It is an external change, while the internal nature of his life and being has not changed. His appearance in dazzling clothes confounds the disciples in Mark, for they do not know his real identity.

The transfiguration is the moment that the disciples got a glimpse of who Jesus really was, when they saw for certain *that he was more than just a man*. Jesus stood before his disciples, on the top of Mount Hermon, and before their eyes he changed. He changed from a rabbi with a keen connection to God into a God-man, even God in flesh, who was greater than Moses and Elijah put

together. This glimpse of who Jesus could become -- of who Jesus really was -- left the disciples slack-jawed and stunned.

The veil is removed. The Good News of Jesus is, in essence, an unveiling. A barrier between God and humanity is removed. Light shines into darkness. Divine access is granted to those whose sinfulness had made it impossible to come to God.

We see this unveiling dramatically symbolized in the incredible events of Matthew 27. At the moment of Jesus' death, the foot-thick curtain veiling the Most Holy Place is rent apart. All may know God's presence. Then tombs break open and dead saints spill out among the living. The line between life and death has been blurred. A new spiritual reality has just been unveiled.

In the Mark 9 text for this Transfiguration Sunday, we read of the unveiling of Christ's glory to the awe-struck disciples. Peter, James, and John believed Jesus was the Messiah, but now they saw his divinity in a new way. Their eyes were opened to a new reality.

They can now see, and we along with them, that Jesus, in the same way that a filter purifies water, has come to offer forgiveness for sins. A filter takes in impure water, holds the impurities inside of itself, and gives back only the pure water. It transforms rather than transmits.

We see this in Jesus: Like the ultimate cleansing-filter he purifies life itself:

- He takes in hatred, holds it, transforms it and gives back love;
- He takes in bitterness, holds it, transforms it and gives back graciousness;
- He takes in curses, holds them, transforms them and gives back blessing;
- He takes in chaos, holds it, transforms it and gives back order;
- He takes in fear, holds it, transforms it and gives back freedom;
- He takes in jealousy, holds it, transforms it and gives back affirmation;
- And he takes in Satan and murder, holds them, transforms them and gives back only God and forgiveness.

Jesus takes away the sins of the world in the same way a water-filter takes impurities out of water, by absorbing and holding all that isn't clean and giving back only what is.

Today, Transfiguration Sunday, is the last Sunday before Lent. The light from God, shone in and through Jesus, is our guide through Lent. We get this gift right before we plunge into the shadows of Lent. In Lent's somber time of reflection, we still carry the light within us, and the light of the world still shines, even as we move toward and are guided to the cross.

The "gospel is veiled to those who are perishing," Paul writes. How many people are there in our world who are perishing from loneliness, from a hunger for connection, from grief, from overwork, from racism or homophobia. What would the good news look like to them, and how can we be a part of unveiling it through our actions?

Paul asserts that the God of creation, the God who said, "Let there be light!" is the same God who creates the light within each of us. Jesus' Transfiguration may cause us to wonder how that looks in everyday life. Who glows with that light? How do they make it known? When we shine with that light, we proclaim Jesus without words, which is the best way.

Two of our youth confirmed their faith a couple of weeks ago and joined the Church as Professing Members. I remember my Confirmation so long ago and it was the practice to take another name to remind us of our faith. At Baptism, the person baptized is announced with their name and they become one of God's special and beloved.

With that in mind, I brought a few potatoes with me this morning and we will christen them with new names. This one is "imitator," and this one is "agi-tator," and this one is "dic-tator." Just as Jesus' appearance was changed at his Transfiguration and just as Peter, James, and John were changed by witnessing that change, so too are those whose eyes and ears and hearts are open to see and hear and know the love and forgiveness of God. Therefore, just as I christened these potatoes with new names, so you, from the moment of your baptism received new names as well. From that moment and from now on, think of yourselves as "sweet-tators" and live like it, proclaiming the good news and the glory of God.