

Transfiguration – 2021
 Luke 9:28-36 Exodus 34:29-35

For some of you, our Bible reading from Luke's gospel, the story of Jesus' transfiguration, is one you have heard before. It comes up every year on the last Sunday before Lent and every gospel writer, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, records it. The details vary, but it is essentially the same story in each gospel. Like Jesus' birth, His baptism, the Last Supper, His crucifixion on Good Friday and His resurrection at Easter, Jesus' transfiguration is an important event. However, it is a confusing story – one filled with mystery. Perhaps even the most studied Christians might have a hard time providing answers to explaining the Transfiguration.

You heard the basics. Jesus takes three of His disciples up a mountain, and while He is praying, His face and clothes are changed – transfigured. Suddenly, two men appear with Jesus in conversation. Luke tells us they are Moses and Elijah from the Old Testament. Jesus doesn't introduce them to Peter, James and John, so how did they know who they were? These two are never described physically in scripture, nor is anything about them physically mentioned in the account of the Transfiguration, but for some reason, they know and are appropriately impressed.

Peter, impetuous Peter, more impressed than the others, springs into action. He proposes a building project! It is as if he is saying, "Let's capture this glorious moment forever." He wants to build a monument. Then they hear a voice and faint from fear. Curious, isn't it, that they don't say anything to anyone after they've come down from the mountain? We know they do eventually, but can you imagine their conversation as Jesus leads them back down the mountain? "Did you see what I saw?" "Was it a dream?" But how could all of us have had the same dream?" "Ya know, if we tell anyone, they'll think we're crazy!" "I'm not saying anything!" "Neither am I!" "So, we're all agreed?" "No one says anything, right?" "Right."

Mountaintop experiences are thought to be the *crème del la crème* for Christians. We're all supposed to have mountaintop experiences and people long for them and search for them and hunt for them. But then, we don't say anything. Sometimes we don't talk about our experiences for fear somebody will think we're losing it. This story tells us its okay to talk about them.

In the Old Testament reading from the Book of Exodus, Moses has a mountaintop experience. He has a face-to-face meeting with God and comes away with his face shining. This so freaks out the Israelites that he puts a veil over his face to keep them from being afraid. The veil keeps them from seeing God's glory and there are things in our lives today that serve as veils, that keep us from seeing God.

Many things keep us from "seeing" Jesus. There are all kinds of things that veil our seeing, that keep us from noticing God around us. It could be our activities or our goals or our busyness, maybe even just the stuff of everyday life – all the things that become our priorities and prevent us from encountering God.

But sooner or later, life tries to awaken us. The loss of a loved one, for example. An illness. A sense of anxiety or loneliness or failure. A disappointment. Or, for a few, a sudden sense of some transcendent feeling which overwhelms us, though I think that is nearly always

preceded by some stressful event.

God can use those events. "All things work for good," wrote Paul. One woman told of a lifetime of drudgery and selfish living. One day she became seriously ill. Later, after recovering, she told a friend that she had accepted Christ while she was sick. "I guess I had to be put flat on my back before I could look up," she said.

If, and when, we "see" Jesus, life is redeemed. Life is changed, attitudes are changed, and nothing is ever the same.

It could have been some kind of mountaintop experience for you. Perhaps something small and seemingly insignificant happened and you were brought up short. When have you been astounded by God? Perhaps it was something positive; for example, "Looking into a clear night sky" or perhaps something negative "Why didn't God heal that person?"

This past week, we have had some very cold weather and there are more days of frigid, sub-zero temperatures in the long-range weather forecast. I haven't said anything, but I've had the thought, "What's with this frigid weather; I think I've had enough," but then realizing what a blessing our Wisconsin winters are.

I say it a little tongue-in-cheek, but I feel sorry for those folks who live in locations where there is no winter or for those folks who go south for the winter. They don't have the opportunity to see the clear blue skies and the brilliant sunshine of these cold, winter days. They don't have the chance to see their breath billowing out or the sparkle of snow. They don't see the beauty of snow falling or hear the crunch beneath their boots. Even the height of the snowbanks is a marvel and, stopping to rest during my snow shoveling, or on my walks to and from the Church Office, I can appreciate how amazing it is. The other night, after the Worship Committee meeting, I stopped just to look up and was once again amazed by the brilliance of the stars on a clear, winter night.

I remember asking a Confirmation class once, "What does a Christian look like?" The youth checked their phones for social media images of Christians, and finding none, came up with the answer that a Christian is recognized by their actions: actions for good, for justice and mercy and service. It was a moment of astonishment for me to hear their stories of how they and their parents or families lived out their faith and, in so doing, created moments of God-presence. There are moments like that in the church and in the faith community when you climb the mountain and see Jesus.

Our Bible reading from Luke today says that Jesus took Peter, John and James up on a mountain. But we also know that He took them down again. Jesus is there on the mountaintops and Jesus is there in our valleys as well. Jesus' presence is the common denominator.

It isn't enough to point to Jesus and say, "Look at his glory." That was Peter's original problem. That's why Peter wanted to build booths on the mountain, to box in the glory. It isn't enough to bask in someone else's glory, even if it is the glory of the Lord.

We've got to come down from the mountain of mystical experiences. Then what? Then it is time to be the transformed people of God in the world!

A journey awaits each of us in this life, up the mountain, down the mountain, a journey through the waters, across the wilderness. There is a life to be lived, in quiet places, on stormy seas, beyond betrayal and mistrust to Easter morning. Our journey is filled with study, marriage,

parenthood, divorce, work, travel, success, and failure. All of this and much more are part of the journey.

God's glory becomes your own wherever and whenever you meet God and you are called and chosen to be sons and daughters of God. And you *are* chosen. You have been chosen by God and baptized into the glory of the death and resurrection of Jesus. You are marked with the cross of Christ forever, a mark that cannot be destroyed.

Your face will glow, too, as the love of Christ fills your being. This glow works its way into the world as you serve God and your neighbor, as you shine like stars in the world. You can be light to all you meet and even to those you may never meet through your apportionment giving.

Whether we see it or not, the world is fraught with God's presence, pregnant with God's glory. The transfiguration reminds us that we are never far from God. Too often, we are caught oblivious, looking the other way, while God's presence is being revealed right in front of our noses. How often do we overlook the glorious presence of God in a human encounter, in a moment of beauty or pain, in an act of quiet heroism or self-sacrifice, in the face of a child, in the tears of...? How often do we miss a mountaintop experience?

In the sixth century, when St. Benedict wrote, "Do all for the glory of God," work was considered valuable in itself. "Treat even the pots and pans reverently as holy objects because God is found in all things," Benedict counseled. Today, monks continue to serve God through work as varied as growing produce and raising chickens to teaching children and counseling adults. Is that so far from what each of us do on a daily basis?

Jesus didn't stay on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus had to come down and get busy and do stuff in the world. The glory that shone through Him had to shine further through works and action.

How about us? We can have mountaintop experiences in each moment of each day, but it is in the valleys that we live out our faith and tell of what we have seen and experienced. We can reflect back and open our eyes to the moments when we hear the voice of angels. That's the way life is. We can have that mountaintop experience every day.

It's interesting that even though the Israelites were a bit freaked out by Moses' glowing face, he continued to preach and teach without covering up his face. He also did not cover his face in further encounters with God. So that means Moses was veiled for all of the ordinary moments of life: when he was eating, sleeping, cleaning himself, and hanging out with the guys at the coffee shop.

Evidently, the Israelites believed they could, and should, hide all of those ordinary moments from the sight of God. We've come a long way. For us, every action of work, common life and recreation can be one long act of worship – a work of service offered to God. It is when we are aware of God among us, when we are fully present to the holiness of the moment, that we are transfigured. Praying while doing the dishes or homework or laundry or everyday cleaning and maintenance of your house or shoveling snow or cooking or . . . All of these are opportunities for holy moments.

What about you? Have you had such experiences? Did those things change your life? Can you live out your faith in those daily experiences? Have you heard God speak to you? Did

you speak to God? Have you shared that precious moment with others?

Surely God's Word is a kind of cheering light for our pathway through life. But the presence of God's light is also a kind of mystery, and, as for Moses here, it can be an awesome brilliance. For God's light always reveals our own smallness, our dwelling in darkness without him, and his serious call that we begin walking in the brilliance and purity of his light. As we experience God's light, we are gradually drawn from the fear of Moses here to the encouraging stance of the disciples in today's Gospel, when Peter finally said, "Master, how good it is that we are here."

The question raised by our Bible readings today is the question of radiance. Are we going to let our lights so shine before others that they will be led to faith? The question is not, "How much light do you have?" but "Will we let it shine?" Do you all know the children's song?

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
 This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
 This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
 Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.

Don't let Satan blow it out. I'm gonna let it shine.
 Don't let Satan blow it out. I'm gonna let it shine.
 Don't let Satan blow it out. I'm gonna let it shine.
 Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.

Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine.
 Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine.
 Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine.
 Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.

Let it shine till Jesus comes. I'm gonna let it shine.
 Let it shine till Jesus comes. I'm gonna let it shine.
 Let it shine till Jesus comes. I'm gonna let it shine.
 Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.

Let's pray: LORD God, send enough rain to keep our attitudes bright.
 Send enough rain that we might appreciate the sun more.
 Send enough happiness to keep our spirits alive.
 Send enough pain so that even the smallest joys in life appear that much bigger.
 Send enough gain to satisfy our wanting.
 Send enough loss that we might appreciate all that we have.
 Send enough "hellos" to get us to the final "goodbye."
 Be our light that we might be light others.

There is always enough. Amen.