

Transfiguration of Our Lord
March 6, 2011
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Scriptures: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 17:1-9

Transfigured

It's funny how human behavior has changed little over time. Don't they say that the more things change, the more they stay the same? We find our own comfortable spaces and we want them to last forever. Time progression can be a killer when you are having a good time. Mexican composer Roberto Cantoral wrote a song about a man that implores the clock on the wall not to tic-tac away the few hours he has left with his lover. Nothing lasts forever, but when things are just the way you want them to be, you'd rather have time remain still. When we find that ideal corner, our sweet spot we would like to fix our residence there and not change anything about it. And yet, when come to realize it, things continue to march on, which consequently makes us also to go forward. Often we forget why we wanted things to remain in the first place and we go on with little effect of what happened before.

Something similar happens to Peter in the Gospel text. You know, Peter is Peter. He is like no one else in the Bible and yet he reflects so many of us. He is often harsh and impulsive. I would not call him the kind of person that thinks about what he's about to say or do. He just explodes with whatever is on his mind. On the one hand, that gives us a very clear image of this person; his honesty makes him transparent. We know what to expect of him. On the other hand, his temperament will often get him into trouble. Oh well, what the heck, he will probably say that "it's better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission."

So here we are; Jesus has just revealed his glory to those with him on the mount. And this is not another miracle like the ones they've witnessed before. This is not about curing a leper or even raising someone from the dead. No, this is bigger. This time they are seeing the full glory of God, radiant in light and splendor. It's happening right in front of their eyes. This is one of those climatic moments when important things happen. So, what does Peter have to say? Well the only thing that someone like Peter can say. Or maybe he says what everybody else is thinking but is not willing to say. Or maybe they would be willing to say it, but Peter gets ahead of them. At any rate Peter's reaction is, "let's make a campsite. I'll put together three tents. There's no way I'm going to let this moment get away. Let's stay together." This is a meeting of VIPs. These three characters, important for the story of the people of God are here, on top of the mountain. Peter and his friends have found their "ideal corner." If they just could preserve it the way it is, they could escape to it every now and then.

Is it wrong to want to grasp something that is precious to you? What's the harm in preserving that which you love? If you find a treasure, wouldn't you try to make it last? There's nothing necessarily bad in that. What happens is that we get so mesmerized with

the momentary vision that we forget about the greater scope of things. You know what happens at birthdays and on Christmas. We buy these great gifts, and we spent a great deal of time and effort to wrap them so very beautifully. You know, it's all about the presentation. But then the person, maybe we've done it ourselves, get's so involved with the gift wrapping that we forget about the gift itself.

What Peter, John and James have witnessed is more than just a display of power. They have had a glimpse of the resurrection itself. These are the VIP's within the apostles; the privileged ones. But their comprehension is limited to just what is front of them. They are not able to understand that Jesus' transfiguration is just a preview of bigger things to come. And don't think now that I'm only talking about what Jesus will eventually do, die in the cross and then resurrect. That's included, but there is more. This is not only about Jesus but about what Jesus offers. This is not only about Jesus' transfiguration but also about the possibility of us being transformed as well. So, that's the question. Yes, Jesus is transfigured. He has revealed in the clearest way yet the glory of God in him. But, can they be transfigured as well? Are their lives transfigured by that experience or are they perplexed to the point that they don't want to move from that place? The same question applies to us. If we have witnessed the power of God in our lives, are we being transfigured by such experience or are we still the same as before?

All this leads me to think of the old proverb "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Don't we mean by that that is better to stick with something you already have than pursuing something else, which could be better, but which you may never get? To be sure, there is certainly wisdom in the saying. Too often, too many have ended up empty handed by letting their greed take over and dismissing what they already have. Nevertheless this is not about getting something for yourself. This is about learning from what Jesus has taught and shown and what has been transformed. I think that Peter, John and James had a little bit of that kind of experience. They went to the mount, they saw, and they fell stunned, even incredulous at what had happened, but they were not transfigured.

It is important to go one step further. It is important that we understand what's behind the mere show of power. It is important that we grasp what it means for our lives. What does it mean? What does it bring to our lives? Are we being transformed? For you and me as individuals, what does it mean that we have known God? For us here at Emanuel, what implications does it have for our life as a church that we have seen the power of God revealed in the history of our congregation? Where do I go, where do you go, where do we go with what we have been shown? Glorious as it was, the display of light and power is limited to that if don't do something with it. Not that God doesn't have the power to change things, but that God is inviting us to change things. The transfiguration is an opportunity to shake off the dust from our passive lives. The transfiguration is an invitation to let go of our fears. That's what Jesus did. He climbed the mountain and he shone with the light of God. But he didn't keep it to himself. He climbed down the mountain and went on to serve in the only way he could. He went to Jerusalem and died.

Yes, let's climb the mountain. Let's have a change of scenery. Let's enjoy with friends. Let us make tents and light up a fire and have a good time in the mountain top. But then lets climb down and look around us and see the many ways in which God call us to be

transformed and to be transforming for others as well. We've been reenergized. Our batteries have been recharged. The cup of blessing is brimming. What are we going to do with what God has given us? In this time of Lent that we are about to start, let us think about the many ways in which we can be transformed and then wonder about the ways in which we can share that with others. Amen.