

Sermon, Transfiguration (August 6, 2023)

<https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearABC/HolyDays/Transfig.html>

[Rev.](#) Sylvia Miller-Mutia, Associate Rector

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, ABQ

O God, who on the holy mount **revealed** to chosen witnesses your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistening: Mercifully **grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may by faith behold the King in his beauty**; who with you, O Father, and you, O Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, **Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.** When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, **he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off,** until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

2 Peter 1:13-21

I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been **eyewitnesses of his majesty.** For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was **conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."** **We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.**

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to **be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place,** until the day dawns and the morning star rises

in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Luke 9:28-36

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, **the appearance of his face changed**, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. **They appeared in glory** and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but **since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory** and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. **Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”** When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and, in those days, told no one any of the things they had seen.

*O God, who... **revealed** to chosen witnesses your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured... Mercifully **grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may by faith behold the King in his beauty**; who with you, O Father, and you, O Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

This past week, Albuquerque Public School Teachers and Students went Back to School, so today at St. Mark's we're celebrating "Back to School" Sunday, taking this opportunity to celebrate and bless ALL teachers and ALL learners—at every age and stage of life.

Today is also August 6th, the date on which (since the 9th Century) the Church has celebrated the Transfiguration of Jesus. The intersection of these celebrations today, and the readings appointed for the Feast of the Transfiguration present an interesting opportunity for us to reflect on our role as God's people in helping each individual in our midst—in our families and classrooms, in our congregation, in our communities, in our world— begin to comprehend and claim their unique beauty—their unique God-given identity, and their unique God-given calling.

The authors of each of the 3 Synoptic Gospels—that is Matthew, Mark, and Luke—tell their stories of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the Mountaintop in ways that parallel their stories of the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. In the stories of Jesus' Transfiguration, like the stories of Jesus' Baptism, the climax of the story comes when a voice from heaven identifies Jesus as the beloved Child of God.

What interests me most about our Gospel today is that, while in the Baptism Stories, two out of the three Gospels describe the voice from heaven addressing Jesus directly in the second person—saying “YOU are my beloved Son”, in the Transfiguration Stories all three gospels agree that the voice from heaven identifies Jesus as a Beloved Son in the third person. In other words, at the Transfiguration, the heavenly voice doesn’t address Jesus directly, saying “YOU are my Son”, rather the voice from heaven addresses the disciples who have accompanied Jesus to the mountain top, saying “THIS is my Son”.

I think this grammatical detail— the difference between “YOU are my Son” and “THIS is my Son”—while slight, is significant. It reminds us that often we won’t, or we don’t, or we CAN’T— hear what God is saying to us, directly. Because our beauty, our identity and our calling—a calling, by the way, which *always* involves change and transformation— is never just a private matter— between us and God.

In order to realize our true beauty, in order to fully become who we truly are, in order to truly do what God has called us to do, we need the participation and witness (and support and challenge) of God’s people. We need others to see in us what we cannot always see in ourselves. We need others to believe about us what we cannot always believe about ourselves. We need others to challenge us in ways we cannot always challenge ourselves. As human persons created the image of a Triune God, our individual identities and vocations cannot be fully realized apart from the context of a community of truth: a community of faith, hope, and love.

An example from today’s first lesson might be helpful in illustrating what I mean. In our first lesson today, from the book of Exodus, the author describes how Moses came down from HIS mountaintop, after receiving the 10 Commandments from God. We read:

“When he came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.”

Moses was transfigured, changed, transformed, by his encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, but scripture says that he himself could not see it. There were no mirrors on the Mountaintop—Moses could not see his own face shining, but the Israelites who greeted him could see it.

If Moses could glimpse his own image at all, **it was only as it was reflected back to him in the eyes of the people of God.**

In the face of Moses, the people of God saw the light of God’s glory revealed.

The light shining through Moses was God’s gift to the People. AND the people’s capacity to see and reflect back that light was God’s gift to Moses.

I believe that the Glory of God IS reflected in each person and each part of God's Creation.

How different things would be—in our families and church, in our classrooms and communities, in our world— if we made it our daily priority and practice to notice that light in one another—and to name it!

This is our prayer, and this is our work, as the people of God in the world. Our prayer and our work is to seek and bear witness to the light of God's glory revealed—first in Moses, then in Jesus, and perhaps even more importantly, in one another—in all of **our** teachers and students and enemies and friends.

Our prayer and our work are “to **be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place**” (as Peter urges his readers in today's Epistle). Our prayer and our work are to “**stay awake**” so that **we can catch a glimpse of God's glory**, (as Peter and his companions did in today's Gospel) even when, like those same disciples, we feel weak and weary and “**weighed down with sleep**”.

Our work **as a community** is to remain awake and attentive and tireless in seeking and bearing witness to the light of God's glory shining in *each* person.

Our work **as individuals** is to bear and believe the witness of the People of God when they hear God call us “Beloved”, when they hear God call us “Chosen”, when they see God's light shining in and through us, when they see us being transfigured and transformed.

The importance of the community's third person witness to God's light within and God's call upon each individual is the first thing I want us to take away from these Transfiguration readings.

There is one other important detail about the Transfiguration Gospel that I want us to notice and remember today, and it's this: Our spiritual community—the People of God with whom we are called to witness, clarify and confirm God's light and God's call to each individual Child of God— includes all our spiritual ancestors AS WELL AS our spiritual friends. Each Sunday, in the Nicene Creed, we profess our faith in the “communion of saints”. This “communion of saints” -- a communion to which we each belong—doesn't only include the toddlers in the aisle and the choir in the loft and the acolytes in the chancel and the people in the pews. This communion also includes the saints depicted in our icons, and the saints who rest in our columbarium in Stoney Chapel, and ALL the saints, in heaven and on earth. We do well to remember the essential role that God's people in heaven—our spiritual ancestors— have to play in helping us each discern our true identity and calling.

Again, we can turn to one of the readings appointed for today for an example. In today's Gospel, Jesus is accompanied to the Mount of Transfiguration by three close spiritual friends— Peter and James and John. These friends are the ones who witness his Transfiguration with their own eyes. These friends are the ones who hear the heavenly voice declare “This is my

Son, my Chosen” with their own ears. These friends are also the ones who bear witness to the fact that they are not actually alone with Jesus on that mountain top.

We read: Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.... Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

It appears that neither Jesus himself, nor Peter and James and John, alone, had the breadth of vision or experience to fully understand the implications of what God was revealing on that Mountaintop. In order for them to more fully understand what was happening, and what was going to happen—in order for them to more fully comprehend who Jesus was and what Jesus was being called to do— they needed to supplement their own perspective with the perspectives of their spiritual ancestors: in this case Moses (who represented their ancestral tradition of the Law) and Elijah (who represented their ancestral tradition of the prophets)

Likewise, we each need spiritual friends and teachers--both in heaven and on earth— to be our companions on the way. To watch and pray and listen with us. And we need to remember that when the wisdom and witness of our friends on earth reaches its limit, our spiritual ancestors are near at hand, ready to step in to add their voices and support.

[Carla’s Story]

A friend of mine recently found herself in a season of change and transition. She diligently sought out the wisdom, prayer, and support of various close spiritual friends. But despite all their prayer and support, she felt she was hitting a wall. She was feeling acutely distressed and uncertain how to proceed—suddenly and somewhat unexpectedly, she felt unsure about her identity, unsure what God was calling her to do, unsure about the nature of the change she was (or was not) undergoing, unsure about what was next.

Into this moment of distress and confusion, a new friend came. This new friend reminded her that she was not, in fact, alone on the mountaintop. Not only was she surrounded by a community of spiritual friends who had gathered to watch and pray and listen with her. She was surrounded by a community of spiritual ancestors who were equally eager and available to offer their support, wisdom, and guidance at this Turning Point in her life.

Later that night my friend sat down in prayer with her journal, and imagined sitting down at a table with 5 spiritual ancestors—5 dear spiritual friends, all now deceased: her late husband, her late godmother, a friend with whom she shared wild spiritual adventures as a young adult, the famous activist who had helped her unite her vocation as an artist with her vocation in the Church, and last but not least the priest who had baptized her. To the utter surprise and delight of my friend, when she sat down in prayer to ask them for guidance, each ancestor readily offered a unique perspective that helped liberate her from anxiety and uncertainty

about the path before her. Altogether, yet each in their own way, they pointed towards a path of freedom, a path of joy, a path of creativity, and faithfulness, and flexibility, and service.

In closing, I invite you to join me in asking yourself what all this might mean for us, here today, as we gather together as God's People at St. Mark's, to Celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration AND "Back to school Sunday".

First let us ask ourselves, as God's people; as a community of truth; as a community of faith, hope and love:

Who are the individuals in our families and congregation, in our classrooms and communities, in our world, in THIS moment, in THIS season, who most need us to bear witness to the light shining through them, to help them begin to comprehend who they are and what God is calling them to do?

How can we "be attentive" to this light, as to a "lamp shining in a dark place"?

How can we "shake off the weight of sleep" and "awaken" so that we might catch a glimpse of "God's Glory" revealed?

Finally, let us ask ourselves, as individuals, as beloved and chosen Children of God:

Who are the "People of God" in whose eyes we see our own true light most clearly reflected?

Who are the spiritual friends whom we can invite to accompany us up the Mountain to pray? Who can help bear witness to the truth of who we are and how God is calling us and how we are being changed?

Finally, who are the saints, the spiritual ancestors, the faithful departed, whose wisdom and witness we seek at this time, to support and guide and encourage us as we continue on our journey, as we continue to be transfigured and transformed by the glory of God?

Let us pray:

*O God, who... **revealed** to chosen witnesses the shining face of your prophet Moses and the shining figure of your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured.... Mercifully **grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may by faith behold all your children—including ourselves—in the fullness of beauty—created, illuminated, and transfigured by the radiant light of your glory. Amen.***