

Sermon

Preacher: The Rev. David Martin, Deacon

Sunday, February 23, 2020

Matthew 17: 1-9

Go (Trans)figure

From the Oxford dictionary, the definition of “transfigure”: transform into something more beautiful or elevated.

And the definition of “transfiguration”: a complete change in form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state.

Today we celebrate the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain. No explanation for this trek is given. While they were up there Jesus completely changes in appearance into a more beautiful and spiritual state. He is transfigured. Elijah (representing the prophets) and Moses (representing the law) show up beside him for a chat.

Peter offers to construct some shelters – one each for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. Peter is my favorite disciple – he’s a guy of action.... although he is usually a few steps behind the curve. Peter is so amazed by what he is seeing I think he’s offering to create places for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses to hang out so they will all stick around a little longer.

But as soon as Peter speaks there is a blinding light and everyone hears the voice of God say “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased.” It’s interesting to note these are exact same words heard from heaven when Jesus was baptized. But this time there is an added instruction – “Listen to him.”

Of course, the disciples are terrified and fall to ground. But Jesus comforts them. He tells them to “Get up” ...” Do not be afraid.”

And then suddenly, everything is as it was before. Moses and Elijah are gone. Jesus looks like his regular self again. The blinding light has disappeared. The voice from heaven is quieted. Jesus, Peter, James, and John climb back down the mountain. No one is to speak of what just happened.

This pivotal moment in the Gospel – the Transfiguration of Jesus – makes it clear to the disciples who Jesus truly is. He is the Son of God, the Beloved.

Transfigure: to transform into something more beautiful and elevated.

Transfiguration: a complete change into a more beautiful or spiritual state.

Doesn’t that sound great? I could stand to be transfigured. How about you?

Of course, we have no aspirations to experience a Transfiguration (with a capital “T”) as Jesus did. And in like hood no one is going to cause our transfiguration. We’re going to have to work on our transfiguration ourselves if we want to be transformed into something more beautiful and elevated. I’d give anything to be completely changed into a more beautiful and spiritual state.

What would that look like?

Wouldn’t it be amazing if we could lose our insecurities and put aside our petty jealousies?

What if we could stop complaining about things and instead be the change we want in this world?

Can you imagine if we all stopped seeing the differences in each other and concentrated on all the things we have in common?

What would it be like if we – at least sometimes – thought about the needs of other people before our own?

I’ll bet each of us can think of some changes in our lives which, if implemented, would transform us into something more beautiful and elevated. We could all be completely changed into a more beautiful and spiritual state.

But how? How can WE be transfigured? What could we do to experience a transfiguration in our lives?

God told everyone on that mountain what to do. LISTEN TO HIM. Listen to my Son, my Beloved. Listen to Jesus

Jesus said “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matt 22:36-40) Listen to him.

Jesus said “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt 22:36-40) Listen to him.

Jesus said "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." (Matt 7:12)

Jesus said "Let your light shine before everyone in the world." (Matt 5:14,16)

Jesus said “Turn the other cheek.” (Matt 5:40-42)

"Love your enemies." (Matt 5:43-45)

"Do not store up treasures on earth." (Matt 6:19-21)

"Do not worry about your needs." (Matt 6:25)

Listen to Jesus.

Jesus said "Place God first." (Matt 6:33)

"Do not judge." (Matt 7:1-2)

"Ask, seek, and knock." (Matt 7:7)

"Care for those in distress" (Matt 25:34-36) Feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, care for the sick, welcome the strange, visit the lonely.

Listen to Jesus.

Jesus said "Welcome the little children." (Matt 19:13-15)

"Do not exalt yourself." (Matt 23:8-12)

"Do not oppose other Christian groups." (Mark 9:38-40)

"Love one another" (John 15:12)

"You should also wash one another's feet" (John 13:14)

"Be merciful" (Luke 6:36)

"You must be ready" (Luke 12:40)

Listen to Jesus. Listen and then do as Jesus has commanded us.

But there is a problem. Transfiguration for us will not be easy because Jesus said a lot of things which are extremely hard for us to do. It will indeed be difficult.

But in today's Gospel Jesus said another command "Get up. Do not be afraid." Listen to Jesus.

**Get up.** A Chinese proverb tells us that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The most difficult part of any task is to simply get started. Jesus tells his disciples to "Get up." Jesus tells us to "Get up." Get started. Make a commitment to follow him. Make a commitment to work toward our own transfiguration.

**Don't be afraid.** Boy, Jesus sure gets to the heart of the matter today, doesn't he? Perhaps the reason it is hard to "Get up" and get started on any project is because we ARE afraid. Afraid of failure. Afraid of looking foolish. Afraid of the hard work involved. Afraid we really don't deserve whatever it is we want to accomplish.

Jesus tells his disciples AND US "Do not be afraid." There is no reason to be afraid because Jesus is with us. Jesus is indeed with us every step of the way. Jesus is here beside us today. Look to your right. Look to your left. There is Jesus in every single one of us.

In 1960 there were many lunch-counter sit-ins. African-Americans and their supporters would sit at "Whites Only" lunch counters and asked to be served. They were not served but they remained seated as hate-filled mobs shouted obscenities at them, called them the most horrible, derogatory names, poured hot coffee over their heads, and squirted them with ketchup. Those protestors peacefully remained seated. The reason they could endure that demeaning hardship is because they were untied. I doubt anyone could sit through such abuse on their own. But together – united for a common cause of good and equality. They were able to endure such hatred. Together, they were able to face their fears.

Together, united in this faith community with our friends in Jesus beside us, we have no reason to fear. We are not afraid.

Lent – the season of contemplation and quiet reflection begins this week. Perhaps some of us may choose a Lenten discipline to work toward transforming ourselves into something more beautiful or elevated. A goal could be to work toward a complete change in form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state.

Get up. Do not be afraid. Listen.

Transfigure.