

Sermon by Pastor Renata Eustis
“Transfigured by Love”
February 11, 2018
Transfiguration 2018 B
Mark 9: 2-9 (2 Cor. 4: 3-6)

The Transfiguration of Jesus is one of those very important Bible events that’s hard for a lot of us to “figure” out. In a few verses, there’s a mass of details, that beg lots of questions. It’s tempting to attempt to explain the Transfiguration. There’s a lot to wonder about in this story.

To be honest, I think Peter was not all wrong in his response: “It is good for us to be here.” It’s good, in the midst of a busy morning of getting ready for the Pancake Brunch, to stop for a moment and take it all in. It is good before we head into the starkness of Ash Wednesday and Lent to be here, to take in the light and the brightness—and even, the glory.

Transfigured is not a word I use much outside of this story. But it’s interesting because it is such a positive word. I guess it’s the opposite of “disfigured”. It means to be changed into something great or beautiful. And it’s also interesting—for the small number of you who like grammar-- because it’s a passive rather than an active verb. Jesus is transfigured—he doesn’t transfigure himself.

One of the insights I gained this time around in preparing, was that Jesus was very ordinary in his physical appearance. He moves around Jerusalem during Holy Week and no one even notices him because he just another Jewish guy, blending into the crowd.

But on this mountain, Peter, James and John, see Jesus looking extraordinarily different. Jesus’s clothes become dazzling white—surely he would have been on the Super Bowl Tide commercial of his day! I also picture Jesus bathed in light—that’s the way the Gospel of Matthew describes it.

Light changes everything. I don’t know how common my experience is but I am drawn to light like a moth. Not bright, overhead lights—I’m not a big fan of those. But I love light that breaks through—like sometimes after a storm when you can see beams that look like they’re coming from heaven.

And I love light on people’s faces—it transfigures them—makes them great and beautiful.

So, in this moment on the mountain, Peter, James and John, are given a new picture of Jesus. The Transfiguration is like a movie trailer for the Resurrection—the disciples know there is something coming and it’s big—but they don’t know how it all fits together.

But the Transfiguration is also like the introduction to a book—which I used to skip over until I realized that it tells you where the author is headed. And when you know where the author is headed, it changes how you read the book. It changes what you pay attention to.

So, what is this new picture of Jesus that the disciples are given? I think it's what we heard in the reading from Corinthians—"the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." *The knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. In this moment, Peter, James and John know that God is present in Jesus in a way that God has never been present before.

So, keep your eye on him—he's more than just another good rabbi. The Transfiguration has transfigured Jesus in their minds—given them a picture that they may not fully understand but that they'll never forget.

There's a picture that I'll never forget. It was taken by Clare and it's of our neighbors and dear friends, Terry and Mary and Nora, their granddaughter. What I love is how Mary and Terry's faces are bathed in this beautiful light. They are transfigured. And even though I've seen them when they're not so transfigured—maybe when they're tired and more than a bit worn out—this picture never leaves my mind. It's almost like I see them this way even when they don't look this way.

What is it that is transfiguring their faces? What is it that is making them shine?

It's more than a talented photographer. What's transfiguring their faces is the immense love they have for their granddaughter, Nora, who is playing right in front of them. They're completely enthralled with her and delight is written all over their faces. If there ever was a picture of what love looks like, this is it. Captured in one stunningly beautiful moment.

So, what is it that is transfiguring Jesus's face? What is the source of the light that is making him shine? The obvious answer—the one the disciples come to immediately—is the presence of God—the glory of God. Moses had seen the glory of God, but until this moment—in their understanding—no ordinary person had seen the glory of God and lived.

And there they were, 4 ordinary Jewish guys—and one of them—Jesus—is looking like the glory of God is on him. They may not know what it means but they will never forget what Jesus looked like in this moment. It is etched in their minds forever.

Back to the question of what is making Jesus's face shine. There's a second answer which Peter, James and John don't understand yet. Jesus is looking at them—just the way Mary and Terry are looking at Nora. Jesus is looking at Peter, James and John, and his face is lit up with brilliant and immense love for *them*.

Terry and Mary have this picture hanging in their house—and Nora sees it. And I'm sure she enjoys the picture—because she loves her grandparents and they look so happy. I don't know when it will happen—but I'd love to be a fly on the wall when Nora realizes that love for *her* is what is reflected on their faces. That beauty—that light on their faces—is pure delight in *her*.

When Jesus and the disciples are heading back down the mountain, Jesus tells them not to tell anyone about what they've seen until after he has risen from the dead. Which also means, “don't tell anyone until after I've been crucified.” This is the part of the movie that didn't make it into the trailer of the Transfiguration. And even though Jesus tells them multiple times that he will be executed, they just can't take it in.

So, at this point, the disciples have a beautiful, dazzling picture of Jesus. But they do not know how immense the love of God in Jesus is *for them*. At this point, they do not have a complete picture—and it won't be until the cross and Resurrection that they do.

But *we* do. We've already seen the movie. At the cross, we know the completeness of God's love for us—and on Easter, we know it will never end.

So, today, we can sit for a moment. We can take in the beauty of this Savior. Knowing that we—and all of this world—are the object of his love. We are the reason his face is transfigured. He's looking at us.

And after this moment, we can go back down the mountain, with that picture indelibly etched on our minds.

Thanks be to God. Amen.