

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**C: The Transfiguration of Our Lord
Exodus 34:29-35, Luke 9:28-43a**

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“The Invitation of Transfiguration”

I love celebrating the Transfiguration of Our Lord. I love it for three reasons.

First, I love the part it plays in the liturgical year.

But before I explain its part in that, I just want to say a few words about the liturgical year itself.

It’s something that I grew up with and never questioned

until I met Christians who didn’t grow up with it and didn’t understand it

and while it wasn’t difficult to explain WHAT it was,

it was hard to explain WHY we observed it.

And then last night I finally realized that it’s kind of like art.

It’s just another way to tell the story of who God is and who Jesus is and who the Spirit is and who we are.

It’s kind of like how stained glass first functioned.

In a day and age where most people did not read and did not have access to Scripture,

stained glass windows told the stories like a picture book.

In the same way, the liturgical year functions as Away – NOT THE ONLY way –

but A way of telling the Biblical story.

And the way the Transfiguration fits into the Biblical story is this....

In the first half of the liturgical year we focus on the life of Christ.

The first half of that life of Christ part of the year is called the Christmas cycle

and it is made up of Advent (preparing for the promised Messiah),

of Christmas (celebrating Jesus’ birth),

and of Epiphany (celebrating how the human man Jesus was revealed to be Divine).

Epiphany itself (on January 6th) is a celebration of Jesus being revealed as divine

to wise men from the East through the guiding of a star.

The Baptism of Our Lord celebrates the beginning of Jesus’s ministry;

the Transfiguration celebrates the beginning of the end of Jesus’s ministry here on earth. And the 2

occasions beautifully bookend the Epiphany season

for on both occasions, we hear the same words from God, “This is my beloved son!”

So the first reason I love Transfiguration Sunday is because of the way it wraps up

the end of the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle

of Jesus being revealed as Divine in such a dazzling way.

And the second reason I love Transfiguration Sunday is because of

the way it connects the New Testament story with the Old Testament,

the way it connects Jesus’s journey with the Hebrew slaves’ journey.

As I said earlier, the Transfiguration celebrates the beginning of the end of Jesus’s ministry,

and that fact is underscored by a word Luke uses.

In the translation we read today it says that Moses and Elijah spoke of Jesus’ “departure”,

but that’s actually a poor translation,

for the word is the same one that gives its name to the 2nd book of the Bible – which is...?

That’s right – they were speaking of Jesus’ “exodus”!

And what was the exodus?

It was the leaving of a place of bondage to embark on a perilous journey to freedom.
As much as the Hebrew slaves wanted to be freed from their Egyptian slave holders,
it wasn't an easy decision for them to make.

It wasn't easy because every journey out of oppression into freedom exacts a cost,
and sometimes as bad as things are, they actually have to get worse before they can get better.

The Hebrews who followed Moses out of Egypt risked

being killed by the pursuing army, being drowned in the Red Sea, and starving to death in the desert.

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,

“Freedom is never given voluntarily by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed”.

The journey to freedom for the Hebrew slaves was full of risks,

& in the end those who began the journey died before reaching the promised land.

And yet it was the price they paid to secure their children's freedom.

In the same way as Moses, Jesus has a choice to make.

In order to lead God's people out of their bondage to sin and death,

he must choose the unfamiliar and dangerous path and risk suffering and death

in order to bring them to freedom and new life in the promised land of abundant life.

So the 2nd reason I love Transfiguration Sunday is because it so clearly demonstrates
how Jesus was choosing to go on a similar journey to that of Moses.

And finally I love Transfiguration recent Sunday because it's the perfect bridge to Lent.

The Transfiguration of Jesus was the exodus that began his journey to lead God's people to freedom,

and the celebration of his Transfiguration is the exodus that begins our Lenten journey

towards a deeper, greater freedom than we have yet known.

And today's lesson gives us at least 3 tips for our journey.

Tip #1: Begin with prayer. Notice how our lesson begins:

“...Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray”.

Jesus' prayer was NOT an individual prayer. He invited others. He took his three best friends.

Their prayer was NOT haphazard or spur of the moment or fly by night.

They went to the trouble of climbing a mountain (!) for the express purpose (!)

of spending some significant time in prayer.

Their prayer was NOT a ritual or rote or written one. They prayed from the heart,

Part of the discipline of Lent to which we are called is prayer.

And Jesus shows us how we are pray:

We are to gather TOGETHER for SIGNIFICANT time to pray FROM THE HEART.

Tip #2: Expect that you will encounter God.

Expect that you will see God and hear God & experience the radiant presence of the living God

and the kingdom and the power and the glory of God.

What happened when Moses spent time with God?

The radiance of God's glory so overwhelmed him that his own face shown!

What happened when Jesus spent time with God?

He began to shine and glow with the dazzling radiance of God's glory!

What happened when Peter, Jake's and John spent time in prayer to God with Jesus?

They experienced the blinding light of God's glory,

they saw visions, they heard God's voice, and were given a command.

Have you ever seen someone who has just fallen in love, gotten engaged,

found out they were pregnant, had a child, won a lottery?

Such people don't have to utter a single word.

All you have to do is look at them and you know

that something incredibly wonderful & beautiful & remarkable has happened to them.

Their life has been changed forever for the better!

Well multiply that a zillion times and that's what it's like to experience God's presence.

Tip #3: Expect prayer will CHANGE you.

Expect that prayer will enlighten you, transform you, and maybe even transfigure you!

I've never been very good at keeping to Advent or Lenten disciplines,
especially when it comes to prayer.

It was something that was verbally taught at church, but I never saw anyone doing it.

There were no prayer meetings at any of the dozen Lutherans congregations I've been part of. There was no one I knew who spent much time in prayer.

And most of the people in those congregations
would have been terribly uncomfortable praying extemporaneously I think,

But a strange thing has happened to me over the past 2 years.

We started gathering for weekly prayer on zoom and we've never stopped.

It's become a vital part of each of our lives.

And then in January I committed to 21 days of prayer & fasting,

praying with one group at 6 AM, noon, & 6 PM, and with a second group at 6:30 AM.

Now you all know I'm not a morning person, right?

But I figured I'd try my best to get through the 21 days.

It began as a discipline, as something I knew I SHOULD do

and so committed to do, and intended to do and then check it off my list.

But after the 21 days with the one church ended,

I found myself CONTINUING with the 2nd ongoing group – at 6:30 IN THE MORNING!

There are days that I oversleep,

and times I fall asleep during the prayer,

and certainly times I go back to sleep after the prayer,

But more often than not, this Very-Much-NOT-a-Morning-Person

is on that for a call at 6:30 in the morning

Why?

Because by meeting God and encountering God and experiencing God more often,

my life has been greatly blessed and abundantly enriched.

The thing that changes when we encounter God

or when we receive a vision or when we hear God speak is that we can never forget.

And so no matter what happens subsequent to that experience,

we will forever remember that encounter.

And whatever it was –

something God said or something God showed you or something you felt –

it's a gift that God gives for you to hold onto.

It's like the finish line of a race, like the destination marked on the map,

or like a gift that's been promised.

As Abraham waited 25 years for that promise child, he must have doubted a million times,

and yet he could never forget when God showed him the heavens

and promised him that his descendants would be at the stars in the sky.

As Moses led the troublesome people through the wilderness for 40 years,

he must have doubted a million times, and yet he could never forget that burning bush

nor the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey.

As Peter, James and John watched their friend and rabbi and Lord suffer & die & be buried

they must have doubted so much, and yet they could never forget that day they saw Jesus transfigured

and heard God's voice saying, "This is my beloved son! Listen to him!"

On Wednesday we begin our Lenten journey.

The goal isn't to be sad or somber or depressed or despairing or to feel bad or broken;
the goal is to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another,
and to live in harmony with creation.

The goal is to EXPERIENCE joy, which comes from experiencing God,
which comes through prayer.

This Transfiguration Sunday offers us the key to the treasure of abundant life.

It offers a vision of God's promised future for each & every one of you God's beloved children. It offers us a
Way through the wilderness of this life and that Way begins with prayer –
prayer that is multiplied by each and every one who joins their heart and voice,
prayer that is intentional and involves significant commitment of time and energy,
prayer that is from the heart.

Today's lesson offers us a Way that
begins with prayer,
expects that through that prayer we will encounter God,
and that through that encounter we will be changed –
changed in a way that brings us joy.

Lent starts on Wednesday.

I encourage you to pray.

And I stand ready to pray with you and for you.

Just let me know that you are up to the challenge

and I promise you, you will be blessed beyond all you can ask or imagine.

May God transfigure us all

that we might shine with the love of Jesus and the power of the Spirit!

Hallelujah! Amen