

The Transfiguration

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And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became dazzling white. Matthew 17 1:14

Jesus was transfigured. The word for transfigured in the Greek is “metamorpho” – it is also translated “transformed.” Made into something new – changed. What does this mean for us today?

Did you ever wonder what the disciples saw up there on the mountain alone with Jesus? We are blessed today to have a beautiful illustration of our Gospel story of the Transfiguration right here in sanctuary. This Transfiguration Window, so beautifully and lovingly restored and returned just a few months ago – is of this very scene. This exquisite window was designed by Tiffany studios of New York in 1901. The window was given by Miss Josephine Leeds in memory of her parents. By the way this information and more about this and all the windows of St. Johns are available on our website.

Take a moment and look at what the craftsmen and artists of Tiffany thought that that might look like. Light – like the light that shone in Jesus face, is the primary element of this window. It is light shining through colored glass, not paint, that makes the colors and the glow. And look how large Christ is! He dominates the space – the window is the most important feature in the sanctuary.

Now, still looking at the window, put your self into today's Gospel story. You are one of the disciples. You are on top of the mountain with Jesus and two of your buddies – and suddenly – Jesus looks like this! Jesus whom you had known as a friend, as just another person, well maybe an extraordinary person, but still a person, now looks like

THIS! And you realize that Jesus is WAY more than “just a person.” Jesus is surrounded by that special light and glow that comes when God is near. Moses experienced it on Mt. Sinai when he encountered God and received the Ten Commandments.

And there's more! Moses and Elijah appear and talk with Jesus! Moses, as we heard in the first lesson today, was the law giver. Elijah was considered the greatest of the Hebrew prophets. So Moses and Elijah appearing on the mountaintop with Jesus confirms for these Jewish men that Jesus represents the culmination of the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah).

So here we are – Jesus shining – transfigured – maybe like this window – and now Moses and Elijah join him – What would you do? We know what Peter did at the time – he started talking and babbling. He had the “I-don't-know-what-to-do-so-I'll-talk-until-I-think-of-something” reaction. “Now its great that we are here, and since we are, lets build three tabernacles three monuments or altars – one for Moses one for Elijah one for you, Jesus and ...”

And while Peter was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. We know about clouds – this word means “the Lord's Veiled Presence.” A cloud covered Mt. Sinai when Moses went up to receive the Ten Commandments. A cloud led the people out of Egypt across the desert on their way into the Promised Land. And now a Voice from the cloud says, “This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well-pleases, listen to Him.”

Do you remember the first time in Scripture that God called Jesus His beloved Son? It was when Jesus was baptized. Do you remember? John, Jesus' cousin, baptized Him in the Jordan River. And the Spirit of the Lord, like a dove, descended on Jesus. And the voice of the Lord said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.” In the story

of the Baptism God was identifying Jesus and this was a start of His ministry. This is the second time. Peter has been chattering away. But after this Peter is speechless.

Matthew says that the disciples just fell down on the ground they were so terrified. It's as though their knees gave way, and they fell down in total fear.

I love the next part of the story. Jesus, whose face is shining and whose clothes are like light, who has been transformed, Jesus, whose face is shining and whose clothes are like light, who has been talking with Moses and Elijah, Jesus now comes over to where the disciples are, leans down to the ground where they have fallen, and touches them and says, "Get up, don't be afraid." Jesus hears the voice of God the Father saying that He is the Beloved Son, and immediately He turns to comfort the disciples, you and me and all of us, with the assurances that are ours by virtue of our being God's sons and daughters.

In the story of the Transfiguration we see what it means to be Beloved of our God. Our God is a loving God, whose glory is reflected in the face of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus, who is so kind, so caring, whose very touch is healing. This is Jesus, our God, who calls us by name and loves us, each of us, in this personal and special way.

We are blessed. When we are baptized, we are given a name that God calls us, and we are sealed and marked as Christ's own. And we are marked as Beloved Sons and Daughters! Being baptized is the first public step in our journey of faith. We acknowledge this relationship with God in community, and we are marked as Christ's own and sealed forever! Later, as teens, we choose to make our own vows in confirmation. As young adults we start on a spiritual journey. We follow Jesus through a life of faith. And we follow that faith on our own, in our families, in our Church, the faith community.

When Patrick is baptized today, his parents and godparents will make promises for him to walk a life of faith. All of us will be witnesses and supporters. And we will make a public affirmation, in the Church community, that Patrick is a Beloved Child of God. He is assured of God's favor and love, just as Jesus reaches down to the disciples and to each of us from the glory of His Transfiguration.

Being baptized, as Patrick will be today, is the first step in our journey of faith to an ever deeper relationship with our loving God. We who witness Patrick's baptism will renew our baptismal vows. We will promise to walk a life of faith "continuing in the apostles teaching and fellowship." That may mean making time for adult formation, retreats, or Holy reading, or even writing icons. We continue to deepen our prayer lives. We ask God's help in all things, ask forgiveness, and we take the sacraments of bread and wine. And in our baptismal vows we will promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. And God will continue to reach out to us in our fear and moments of trial.

We are reminded of trials today as we bury the "Alleluia" banner and prepare to enter the season of Lent. We will remember through Lent that Jesus is with us in all things and at all times. Jesus tells us, "Do not be afraid." Nothing can separate us from God's love. Not even death. And on Easter Day, of course, we will celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death!

So on this Transfiguration Sunday as we enter St. John's Church and see the Transfiguration window, and as we renew our Baptismal vows, let us remember that Jesus, our God, calls us to be transformed. He calls us by our names given in Baptism. He is there to comfort and encourage us in our lives of faith. And by His death and resurrection, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be transformed into a New Creation in Him. Amen.