

Transfiguration

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A sermon by Pastor Fred Hedt
Landover Hills, Maryland

“What’s Next?”

Matthew 17.1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The text for this sermon is today’s Gospel lesson, St. Matthew’s telling of the Transfiguration story: “Jesus was transfigured before them: his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white...suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

There are a lot of people – a lot of *us* – who find life to be a constant grind, a daily struggle to keep it all together. Think of the poor fellow who says “My house just burned down, my wife ran away with the mailman, my underage daughter is the mascot for the local motorcycle gang, my son dropped out of the last year of med school to go ‘find himself’ on a yak farm in Tibet, and this morning I found a phone message from my Doctor that I have six months to live! *What in the world could happen next?*”

We can easily get world-weary and life-exhausted – what’s next? What else could happen? What else is going to go wrong? What else do I have cope with? Figure out? Fix? What’s next?

If you can’t relate to what I’m saying ... count yourself blessed! Say “thank you Jesus!” You may not realize how fortunate you are.

But I’m thinking this morning about those who have “come up on the rough side of the mountain.” Who in moments of weariness say “What’s next?” To them I would say: Take heart! God provides moments of transfiguration. Moments where God wants to remind us that there is **more** than eye can see. That there is a reality **behind** the one we see and touch, a reality **behind** the daily grind and constant struggle. A greater reality that points to redemption for all our weariness. A greater reality that answers the question “what’s next?”

“Jesus was transfigured before them.” The ‘them’ is the Apostles, specifically Peter, James, and John. They have been following Jesus for 2½, close to 3 years. And it is quite possible that following Jesus has become a grind. For 2½ years they have been little more than homeless beggars. I’m not quite sure that’s what they envisioned that day in Galilee when Jesus said “follow me” and they literally dropped everything and left everyone to follow Jesus.

Now opposition is beginning to heat up – just about everywhere they go people who don’t particularly like Jesus are showing up to harass him. And lately Jesus has been talking about **martyrdom**. Just last week when Jesus said he was going to Jerusalem to be killed, Peter said “We’re not going to let that happen”. Jesus snapped at him! “You devil! You’re getting in my way! Get behind me.” The next thing St. Matthew writes is “Six days later ...” It may have taken that long for things to cool down.

Six days later Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a mountain and is transfigured. Jesus lets them see for a moment the fullness of his glory. Lets them peak behind their day in, day out experience for this moment of glory. “Men, I understand it’s become a grind. But there is a *realler* reality behind all of this. And that’s what you serve and that’s what it’s all about and that’s what you work for.”

“Listen to him,” God says, “Listen to him.” Because what comes next – after Jerusalem and after crucifixion – what comes next is Christ glorified and ruling over all creation. There is nothing broken that will not be fixed. There is nothing that you have given up that will not be restored. There is nothing old that will not become new. This moment of glory is a peak at that future.

If you are weary, keep eyes and ears and heart open for God will provide moments of transfiguration, moments when you get a peak *beyond* the day in, day out; moments where you can see the realler reality that lies beyond what you can see and touch. Hints that what comes next is *not* more hardship and pain, but Christ glorified and ruling over all creation.

I am *not* talking about moments of joy or beauty or inspiration. Those are wonderful in themselves. Yesterday I was riding my bike on the C & O Canal trail and stopped to watch the biggest blue heron I had ever seen. And while taking that in a bald eagle flew across the trail. It was amazing. I thanked God for that special moment. But it was a moment that would have been appreciated by any riding companion whether they were Christian, Muslim, or an atheist. I am *not* talking about moments of joy or beauty or inspiration but something more profound. Moments when we experience the reality that Christ is bring about.

Transfiguration moments come in the Word and in Worship. In a song or in a prayer, in water or bread & wine. Moments in which we see beyond the “now” and experience God’s “what’s next”.

Worship, like we are doing this morning, is intended to provide those moments. Our liturgy is a divine drama, a play in which you are not the audience but the cast. Typically we begin with “confession and absolution”: we go all the way back to birth and remember that we came into the world sinful, separated from God. Forgiveness pronounced “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit recalls that moment when God reached through water to washed us clean and claim us as His children. And then the liturgy transports us all the way up to Heaven: we join that song that is unceasingly sung before the throne of grace: Holy, holy, holy. In our celebration of Holy Communion we remember not only that night when Jesus was betrayed, but rehearse the heavenly feast yet to come. Our liturgy is an opportunity to enact the reality that lies behind all we see. A transfiguration moment. That’s what it can and should be.

My dad use to make sausage. You know what you learn when you watch someone make sausage? Nothing comes out of that sausage machine unless YOU PUT SOMETHING IN. And what you put in may not be all that pretty.

Nothing is going to come out of your worship experience unless you put something into it. If you sit there zoned out, detached, passive, a spectator, mind wandering – not much is going to come of that. Our liturgy is a divine drama, an opportunity to experience what lies behind the world we see and to taste what comes next in the divine scheme of things. But to get something out of it we

have to put ourselves into it, open ourselves to God's presence, meet God here. And then it can become a moment of transfiguration. A moment when we can see

That beyond our sin is One who forgives.

That beyond our illness is One who heals.

That beyond our hurt is One who restores.

That beyond our weariness is One who refreshes.

That beyond our rejections is One who loves us unconditionally.

That beyond our despair is One who gives us hope.

That beyond our defeats is One who has already won the victory.

That beyond our drifting is One who gives us direction.

That beyond our mortality is One who gives life.

What's next? No matter where you find yourself right now, the answer to that question is found as Christ is transfigured before us: His face shines like the sun and his clothes are as bright as light and his father proclaims "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased: Listen to him!"