

TRANSFIGURED

EXODUS 34:29-35  
LUKE 9:28-36

A SERMON FOR TRANSFIGURATION  
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2013  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
MARIANNA, FLORIDA  
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“We’re all in our places with bright shining faces...” I learned that as a child, I think it must have been in kindergarten at Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, in Knoxville, Tennessee, and that memory, and the life-long friendship of a fellow named Ed Shipe, who is one day younger than me, is about all I remember from kindergarten. Oh, I guess that is where I learned how to play kick ball and capture the flag, but I’ve gotten too old for those pursuits.

I think about that childhood lyric when I read our texts for Transfiguration Sunday.

Moses certainly had a bright shining face when he came down off the mountain with the Ten Commandments. He was transformed, transfigured, so much so that even his brother, Aaron, not to mention the rest of the Israelites, were afraid of him, so afraid that he apparently wore a veil for the rest of his days. The only time Moses took off the veil was when he went into the tent of meeting, the precursor of the Holy of Holies, to talk to God. And then, with face shining, he would step out of the tent, and replace the veil.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, not just the face of Jesus, but even His robe, His garments were transformed, transfigured. One of the other gospels tells us that his clothing was whiter than any bleach on earth could bleach it.

Now we’ve never seen anything like the transfigurations of Moses and Jesus. Oh, we’ve seen sunburn. And we’ve seen faces glowing with happiness, with love, but faces shining with a divine light, with a supernatural luminescence, that is something else again.

In the twenty-first century world, many folks reject the supernatural, reject anything they can’t witness, reject anything that they cannot scientifically, empirically verify.

On the other hand, there are people in the twenty-first century world who are hungry for anything supernatural, who launch searches for ghosts and late night television is full of things like “celebrity ghost stories”. The “Twilight Saga” is the stuff of best-selling books and box-office hit movies. Vampires and werewolves abound!

We mainline Christians are somewhere in the middle of that spectrum: we accept by faith things that cannot be demonstrated, and we reject that which is outside our Biblical belief system. We may read the Scientific American, and we may read Ann Rice novels and go to vampire movies, but we aren’t defined or limited by either one of them.

If we are truly faithful to what we believe, we are open to the supernatural, because we expect, indeed hope for, God to intrude into our world, into our daily lives, in all sorts of ways.

We pray, expecting God to answer, not with words, as God did with Moses on Mount Sinai, as God spoke to Peter and James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. We expect God to answer with actions that we can see, if not in a blinding, shining light, but in the effects of God's presence in our lives.

We pray for healing for a loved one, and when that loved one gets better, we see it as the answer to prayer. We pray for peace in our own hearts and minds and lives, and when it comes, it is truly the answer to prayer.

Sometimes, our prayers are trivial. I can't tell you how many times I've heard someone say that they were late for an appointment or a class and prayed for a parking place, and one miraculously opened up in front of them, like the Red Sea parting before Moses.

Sometimes our prayers are answered in the negative, when we pray for someone to live, and they don't, or when we pray for a burden to be lifted and it isn't. And we accept that God's will, God's plan, God's view, is different from ours, and that God has spoken in a way different from what we'd prayed for.

Either way, when we feel that God has answered our prayer, our view of God, our understanding of God, is transformed, transfigured.

Tom Long, my friend and one of the best preachers in America, who presently teaches at Chandler School of Theology, though I studied under him at Columbia Seminary in my doctoral program, has this to say about the transfiguration:

"What we see first, of course, is Jesus. Yes, we also see dazzling clothes, the cloud of divine protection, Elijah and Moses. We hear, 'This is my Son the beloved.' But...the transfiguration account can best be seen as a 'christophany', a moment when we see 'who Jesus Christ really is.' What gets transfigured is not Jesus, but our perception of him. Our vision changes: we see Jesus for real.

One of the things we see is that Jesus is beloved by God. We could never have seen that down in the valley, never guess that he is beloved by anybody. Already, he has been misunderstood by his disciples, rejected by his hometown, drained of his power by his neighbors' scoffing unbelief and plotted against by the authorities."

Tom Long concludes:

"But if we see Jesus for real on that mountain, we see ourselves for real too... If Jesus' ministry experienced rejection, failure, and violence, so (will ours). Down in (our) own valley, all (we can) see (is) life and hope slipping away. But up on that mountain, we

can see (our) selves in Jesus' light. (We can see our) own baptismal garments dazzling like the sun, see the cloud of God's care hovering over (us), hear God calling (us) 'beloved.'

(Quoted and paraphrased from *The Christian Century*, March 7, 2006)

And that is what transfiguration means to us. We are somehow changed. We are somehow transformed. We are somehow transfigured.

We are empowered, enabled, to perform acts of kindness, to speak words of love, to stand faithful and true in a world that isn't either. We don't become supernatural, or super-heroes. We become fully human, after the example of Jesus Christ. And if our faces shine, it is with the light of the love of God made known in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I guess for us it isn't our bright shining faces but our bright shining actions that reflect the light of God's presence, God's light in our lives.

Maybe our introit said it best: Make our lives a window, so your light can shine through.

Let us pray:

Come to us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Transfigure our drab, prosaic, too-fully-explained yet too superstitious world. Come with all your majesty, in your unapproachable glory, come. We may not know how to deal with you, or what to make of you, but we pray in confidence that you know full well what to make of us and how to deal with us, for you made us in your image, and we are your beloved. Make our lives shine, and transfigure us, that the world may behold your glory, in Jesus name we ask it. Amen.