



**Worship Series: “Growing in Gratitude”**

“Transformed in Gratitude”

Sermon Text: Matthew 17:1-9

FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

Transfiguration Sunday: 26 February 2017

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“The church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion;  
it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society”

--Martin Luther King Jr. (1929 - 1968), Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 1963.

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Every lesson we hear from the Bible has a certain context in which it is heard. Our lesson today the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus or changing of Jesus is preceded by certain things Matthew’s Gospel tells us to help us understand what is going on as Matthew tells the story.

The run up to this story could begin at Genesis 1, I suppose, but for our immediate concern we will look to Matthew 16. In the midst of that chapter, Jesus asks his disciples: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

They said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

Jesus then said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” This seemed to please Jesus and after some talk about what that confession might mean, Jesus “sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.” Not only that but Jesus then speaks to them about his death, resurrection, and return—but my guess is that this was far too much for the disciples to take in, let alone comprehend.

Prior to our lesson today, Jesus continues to tell the disciples exactly what they are in for if they want to be his disciples. He says things like: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Jesus asks them “what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?” If this does not sound ominous, then I do not know what could.

Our lesson comes now after Jesus gives full disclosure of the cost of discipleship. Our lesson may show them exactly who it is that calls so much forth from them. Hear the lesson for the day: 1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, 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!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." 8 And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Like before, as the disciples—Peter, James, and John—come down the mountain with Jesus, he tells them again "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Then, after some more Sunday school lessons about Elijah and John the Baptizer, Jesus and these three disciples then return to reality. Maybe most of us could see where the transfiguration experience for the three disciples might seem quite dreamlike.

After our lesson, the Transfiguration story, something fascinating happens. A father comes to Jesus and asks Jesus to heal his epileptic boy (Matthew 17:14-20). [On a side note, this is from Indianapolis (AP)—An Indiana measure that would allow some epileptic people to be treated with oil derived from cannabis plants has cleared the state Senate—epilepsy is still an issue]. Jesus heals or cures the youngster and then teaches the disciples yet another lesson about faith and faithfulness. Again, after this momentous healing, Jesus once again foretells of his death and resurrection.

Here are several things we can take away from this Bible account:

\*Matthew connects Jesus to Israel's long spiritual journey by means of his mountaintop conversation with Moses and Elijah.

\*Matthew affirms Jesus as God's own son—"from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved.'"

\*Matthew endorses Jesus as God's legitimate voice: ". . . with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

But of all the things this story means it does tell us that after the most remarkable experiences in our lives we will still return to the valley to the blind, the lame, and the halt. As we come from our mountains of transfiguration, there will always be the epileptic waiting for us as we come from our most remarkable mountaintop experiences.

Maryetta Madeleine Anschutz writes:

These are the moments when we realize God is present in suffering and sacrifice, just as God is present in the promise and potential of our lives. This moment of transfiguration is just such a moment. On one hand, the transfiguration affirms Jesus' divinity; on the other, it begins to give the disciples eyes to see God's light in the chaos to come: death, loss, fear and resurrection, the work of the early church. The challenge to the disciples is to live in a world without Jesus' bodily presence. The transfiguration anticipates this challenge, inviting us to live in "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). As that light shines in our hearts, the incarnate God is made real in the every day.

C. S. Lewis writes a final word from Aslan in *The Silver Chair*:

Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly. I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain, the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearance. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters."

God prepares people in the transcendent encounters of our lives to endure the world below, the world of the cross, the world that has the ability to break us and yet is never beyond God's redemption. These encounters happen on mountaintops with a blinding light for some. For most, they happen in the ordinary moments of our classrooms, boardrooms, and soup kitchens—any place where we make a space for the Holy to be present

(*Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*).

Marva Dawn described keeping the Sabbath as an exercise in:



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Ceasing—stop work

Resting—rest for life

Embracing—recreating relationships

Feasting—celebrating life and growing in gratitude toward God through worship

(*Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Eerdmans, 1989).

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