

Transfiguration Sunday Sermon on Mark 9:2-9 February 18/19, 2012

God's grace and peace to all of you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus. Amen.

The passage you all just heard is called the “transfiguration.” We know the Greek word a little better than the word we have here in English. “Transfiguration” in Greek is *metamorphōthā*, metamorphosis. Whatever word you want to use, transfigure or metamorphosis, they both basically mean how something changes its shape. Like when we're kids we play with some Play-dough we transfigure, we metamorphose it into something like a dog, or a pizza, or if you aren't too artistically inclined, you roll it in your hand and call it a “snake.” But in this passage we see one big thing change; we see how Jesus refocuses everyone for the ministry God has called him to. When we read and hear this passage we might think that the big change was in Jesus' clothes, how they became super white. But the big change, the big transfiguration, the big metamorphosis is how Jesus puts all his focus on what he was born to do, what he was baptized to do, the reason why God sent him in the first place: Jesus puts all his focus on the cross, on his impending death, on the fact that his main purpose was that he has come to die for the sake of humanity, for you and for me.

But this isn't exactly what the disciples had in mind. St. Mark reports that these disciples spent day after day with Jesus, seeing him heal people, exorcise demons and unclean spirits from people, they listened to him teach people about the kingdom of God, they saw him walk on water, they saw him feed four thousand with a few pieces of bread, but now, all of a sudden, Jesus tells the disciples that he's come for a much more important reason than healing people and doing miracles – and that much more important reason is that he has come to die and to be raised after three days. So after days and weeks and months of seeing Jesus “talk the talk and walk the

walk,” Jesus tells the disciples the reason why he has come. At the end of chapter 8 we read about how Peter doesn’t really want Jesus to undergo all this suffering and pain and death. After all, who can blame him? Things were going so good for them. Sure, Jesus might have gotten run out of town here and there, but all and all, things were going so good, why does Jesus have to ruin things by being a “Debbie downer?” And not only does Jesus rebuke Peter and call him a devil for trying to stop him, Jesus ups the ante and tells Peter, the disciples and a large crowd that if they want to follow him, they are going to have to “deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” And after that he ups the ante even more and tells them that whoever is “ashamed of me and my words...the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the angels.” And in today’s passage we see the same thing going on.

In today’s gospel reading Peter, James, and John get to witness this mountain top experience by seeing two of God’s best prophets, Elijah and Moses. But just as soon as they see this happen, Peter doesn’t want this feel good time to end, he doesn’t want to face the fact that Jesus must go to be crucified, so he wants to make some tents for everyone to stay in. But this time Jesus doesn’t rebuke Peter, this time God the Father does it when He shouts from the heavens, “This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him!” Nothing will stop God from doing what God wants to do. And nothing will stop Him from getting His point across that His Son, Jesus, is to be listened to, even if it means having everything Peter or anyone else thought about God, even if it means having what everything Peter or anyone else thought about what a savior is or what a savior is supposed to do thrown out the window and destroyed.

So what can be something we take away from this passage? Two things really jump out at me:

One thing that jumps out to me is that Jesus keeps coming back to Peter. Peter misunderstands Jesus over and over again, yet Jesus still stays with him. And this is so freeing for us because we may have doubts, we may misunderstand Jesus, yet Jesus refuses to leave us alone, Jesus refuses to let us stay in our own darkness. The only thing we need to do is keep following him, carrying our crosses, stumbling a bit here and there on the way, but Jesus wipes the dirt off our face, picks us up, and gives us a shove to keep going. Throughout Jesus's life Peter and a number of other people didn't understand fully who he was, yet Jesus continued his work of transfiguring them, metamorphing them, molding them into dedicated disciples. And in the same way we keep journeying on with Jesus transforming us, transfiguring us, metamorphing our lives, our actions, our thoughts and our hearts so that we too would become stronger disciples. Will it look pretty? Not always. Will we fall and falter? Probably. We will misunderstand things from time to time? I'm guessing so. But that's part of the beauty of following Jesus because even though we don't know what might be coming next in our lives we know that we have Jesus Christ guiding us, holding us up, and pushing us along into a future filled with crosses, but also filled with hope.

The other thing we can take away from this passage is a fuller and clearer picture of who God is. After all, Peter needed to be reminded again and again and again, and so do we. We can learn and we can take from this passage that God does not want to be understood apart from the suffering, the death, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And because God does not want to be understood apart from Jesus, that means we need to get used to paradox – getting used to things which shouldn't be together, being together. For example, where do we see God's power and strength? In the weakness of the crucified messiah, barely able to carry his own cross, barely able to say anything while hanging on that very cross. Where do we see God's

power to forgive? By being beaten and mocked by the people he came to forgive. Where do we see God's power over sin? By sending His Son to be with and give new life and freedom to people stuck in sin. Where do we see God's power over death? By having his Son die as a ransom for many and by leaving the tomb that held him captive for three days empty. And the reason we call this "gospel" is that God did all of that in Christ, being weak, being mocked, being nailed to a cross, forgiving those who were responsible for his death, rising from the dead – the reason this is "gospel" is that God did all of that for you. So that even though you maybe be weak, physically or spiritually, you have the strength of God at work in you because God has given you His Holy Spirit. Even though you are a sinner, you know you have already been forgiven by God because of the blood of the cross. Even though you will die, because Christ defeated death once and for all and for you specifically, you will rise again.

But this is what the Gospel does to us folks, this is what Jesus does to us. He transforms you. He transfigures you. He changes you. He metamorphosizes you. He renews your mind and purges out everything that is hostile to God. He renews your heart when all you might have in there is despair or worse, nothing at all. He breathes life into you because you are dead on the inside. He gives you hope when there is nothing left to be hoped for. He gives and shows you a gracious and loving God when all you knew before was God's wrath, anger, and judgment.

With Lent starting soon, may we, like Jesus in today's reading, all turn our focus to this man, to his sufferings, to his death, and to his resurrection that first Easter morning. Because to know God is to know Jesus. May God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continue to transform, transfigure, change, and metamorphosize us all until the day when he comes again in full glory. Amen.

