

“The Transfiguration”
Matthew 17:1-9
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I found myself struggling with this text, not because I don’t love the strangeness of it all, it’s just that it doesn’t really fit my preaching style. (boo-hoo, right?)

I like to be able to dig deep in the historical context and try to make it clear why the author wrote this down, look at the cultural context, who the intended readers/listeners of the time were...and that just doesn’t work here, we have to just accept it’s weird. I think I would be doing you a disservice to make something up; I think it’s okay to embrace the mystery and **wonder** of it all.

This message will be more reflective and **hopefully** help create space to wander rather than a historical lesson with answers. I would like shift our minds to Peter, imagine being in his shoes, or being his good friend trying to understand his perspective.

Gotta love that guy, right? He tries so hard to do the right thing, but also other times just misses the mark. We see that right at the end chapter 16 Jesus says, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...

I am sure Peter is feeling great, like, Yes! I answered correctly, I’m on Jesus good side, feeling alright. But then just a few verses later, Jesus decides to let them know he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. Peter was not having it. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

It seems like Peter felt this whiplash, right? (well, it feels like this to me reading the text on Peter’s behalf at least). The chapter then ends with a promise, that important judgement is coming, and coming rather quickly. This insight from chapter 16 helps us to understand what the disciples know before going on the mountain. So, the cat is out of the bag, Jesus will be killed, but also resurrected.

And six days later after hearing this life-altering new, Jesus takes his 3 amigos, his inner circle, his closest disciples up on this mountain, I **wonder** about on the various thoughts that were running run in their heads. Are they thinking that Jesus has completely lost his mind? Do they believe him and are just completely heartbroken knowing their days with Jesus are numbered? I would imagine when they were hiking up, they were pretty quiet, not having a clue what to do with this heavy information that was hard to process.

And if things aren’t already confusing, and hard to imagine. Jesus is *transfigured*. When I looked up the definition of transfigured it simply said, “something more beautiful”. But in the Greek the word is *metamorphosis*— which is a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by

natural or supernatural means. I **wonder** how I would respond and react in that moment. I think I would just freeze, because I would be overwhelmed, but I don't know for sure.

Jesus' face begins to shine like the sun – his clothes become a dazzling white – “white like the light” – it's as if Jesus is lit from within. A stunning sight... AND if that wasn't enough, suddenly these two prophets that have died hundreds of years ago, Moses and Elijah – are talking with Jesus. As if this was a natural thing to happen. Peter's response to this is my favorite part of this text. A lot of commentaries and scholars mention these tents that Peter wanted to make where like the tabernacles in Leviticus, that he was trying to honor Jesus, Elijah, and Moses in the way that made the most sense to him... but I think it's a little more than that.

I think this is a way for him to soak up this magical moment and to make it last a little longer. Just like how when we're having a really good dream and you don't want to wake up because you know it will all just disappear. But if you happen to wake up you try really hard to force yourself asleep again, feeling like you'd to anything to go back to being in the dream where anything felt good and right.

Or like when we are gathered in a room full of people that we love and adore it becomes the sacred space that you just want to never end. Wouldn't it be nice to somehow capsule those precious moments in jar to hold on forever? This tracks with y'all right? I think this is why I take pictures on my phone so much, trying every way I can to soak up a place I've been and/or time I've spent with people I love. I think of all my picture taking is like the tents Peter wants to build. But we know we have to wake up from those glorious dreams and can't lay in bed forever, and we know those pictures just do justice and the awe of the beauty of living in that moment.

It's interesting the disciples are not fearful of what they are seeing but when they hear God's audible voice, that's when they are overcome with fear. I **wonder** if it because it's in that moment they realize when Jesus told them he will be killed and resurrected six days prior, it became real to them. When Jesus goes over to touch them, reassuring them everything is going to be okay and to not be afraid... I imagine him gently grabbing each of their faces, wiping away tears, looking right into their eyes. Being very intentional about being very present in that moment they were absolutely terrified. And as they get up, life appeared to be normal again, but it really wasn't. How does one come down that mountain and continue on like their normal, their normal will never be the same.

We also don't know why Jesus tells them to keep this experience to themselves until after the resurrection. Maybe He thought was no one was going to believe them so why bother? Or maybe this was just supposed to be a little scared gift for them to hold unto that they didn't have to worry on trying to convey to others. This text leaves us with lots of **wondering**, and that's totally okay, because you said we going to embrace the weird, right? This week what I found myself pondering the most is how this text comes to us on our last Sunday in the season of epiphany, right before Lent.

While there isn't much in this story as far as historical content goes, we can say it wasn't only Jesus' body that was transfigured on that mountain, **but Peter, John, and James hearts were too**. They experienced life, light, and the mythical in a way they have never seen before.

Coming from a more conservative church background, I taught to have an issue with using the word mythical because they associated it with something being fake/fictional, like a fairytale...as if those were bad things **but an equivalent word to mythical is legendary and fabulous**. Which is exactly what this transfiguration experience is and it's okay to accept it as such. It's a truly divinely, and accurately weird, so it's when we say this story is captivating and keeps us in **wonder**, that is most definitely enough.

I don't know about you but it feels like the start of Advent to the end of Easter feels like one massive and deeply emotional marathon! We go from anticipation of the Savior, to celebration of the birth of our Lord, to hope through the life of Jesus, to sorrow knowing that Jesus will be crucified to the gruesome death, to the joy of the resurrection. We go through that cycle regularly in our lives, not just in the liturgical calendar but in our lives. We are constantly going through the cycle of anticipation, celebration, hope, sorrow, and joy in something new to start or something old to be re-born.

What is the thing that holds us through it all? **The epiphany of light, allowing God to transfigure our hearts to see the world through our Creator's divine lens.** This text of awe and **wonder** that Jesus' beloved disciples got to experience, I believe this helped carry them all the way through the resurrection. Did they mess up at times and didn't always get it right? Absolutely. And Jesus knew that was going to happen and still kept the light and **wonder** going.

We have an abundance of opportunities of our lives to experience the awe and **wonder** of God's light and to be transformed by that... there is absolutely no limitations of what that looks like. Clearly. This could look like a numerous of things like: soaking up breathtaking view in nature, dreams, visions, sign/**wonders** (I know some crazy talk here), a person being a listening ear in a time of need, someone seeing your talents and strengths and them letting you know how much that appreciate you! Obviously not an exhaustive list but wanted to add both some of the ordinary and what we traditionally call the unordinary.

And as God's disciples we are called to be that light for one another...but what can that look like?

It could be giving a hug that lasts a little longer when you know they are going through a lot.

It could be giving someone a call and simply saying: "hey, was just thinking about you, how are you?"

It could be when someone you care about ends a significant relationship in their life and they tell that they'll miss the good morning texts so you then send you a "good morning" text the next morning.

It could mean feeding and clothing the poor, befriending the widow, offer an exhausted single parent to babysit for free.

It could mean looking someone right in the eyes and say: I see you, you are beloved, and I am so glad you're a part of my life.

Some of those things like a matter of seconds to accomplish, but you never know how much of a light that would be for something going through a really dark time.

The promise of transfiguration is that the glory of God transforms us—from the inside out. It's pretty incredible that when God transforms us, we can then be the light for each other, our communities and the world. Amen.

Benediction:

God's Beloved, when you go out in the world today, remember the ways the Transfigured God has changed your life in the ordinary **and** in the radical ways ...and may that be your strength and guide to be the light in our world. Go in peace.