

***Seeing Ourselves Through the Light of the Transfiguration***

Sermon for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany

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Trinity Episcopal Church, Asbury Park

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*For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)*

I would hazard a guess that the vast majority of us here in this church today haven't have some experience of using the internet, and a good chunk of us have probably also used social media like Instagram and Facebook, whether on a computer or a smartphone. So you probably know that as we explore the digital world, the digital world is also exploring us. The ads you see are generated based on your previous browsing. The videos and posts you see on social media are influenced by what you've looked at before. When I go to my Instagram search function, I see four things: food videos and recipes; fitness tips (which I might need after all the cakes I look at); clips of tv comedies from my childhood, specifically a lot of Golden Girls and Designing Women (which makes me wonder just exactly how Instagram figured out that I was a gay kid in the 1980s); and animal videos. Lots and lots of cute animals, especially foxes, red pandas, sloths, and on the more domestic front, cats (which I can only admire from afar, since I'm allergic) and of course, dogs. Most of you know that I have a dog, a pomeranian named Bruno, but you may not know that I find just about any dog I come across in person or on a screen, impossible to look away from. Not only are they adorable, but they're really strange and funny. They make me smile and laugh. And Instagram has figured out that sometimes they pluck my heartstrings. I can't help but get emotional when I watch videos of rescued dogs who are aggressive or afraid of their own shadow, who, after receiving love and attention from a caregiver for a few days or weeks, are totally transformed into lively, playful, and affectionate companions. Through neglect and abuse, they became something they were not meant to be, but through love, they became healthy and happy dogs, living their best canine selves. In the end, dogs are not really so different from human beings. We too need love and care to thrive. When we are mistreated, we become like those sad and scared shelter dogs. When we are loved and given the right conditions to thrive, we can be the people God created us to be. And sometimes, to inspire us to change course and seek out what we need to thrive, the first thing we need is a vision of what is possible.

That is what I see in the Transfiguration.

*Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.*

Transfiguration is derived from the Greek word, metamorphosis, and literally means to change forms. The season of Epiphany is all about God's light shining into the world, and today's dramatic episode in which Jesus' face shines like the sun is the culmination of this time in the church calendar, preparing us to enter the 40 days and 40 nights of Lent, beginning this week on Ash Wednesday. Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses to a transformation. They saw Jesus shine like the sun, outwardly revealing his inner divine nature.

The episode is a vital midpoint in Jesus' mission, connecting his teaching and healing ministry with his death and resurrection. In the chapter preceding today's gospel story on the mountainside, Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" Taken together, this teaching and the Transfiguration speak to the power of self-offering love to transform the world. The Transfiguration reveals Christ's divine nature, but that is the same nature that cannot stay on the mountain, but must go back down to continue the mission toward the Cross, which is the only way to the Resurrection.

*Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.*

Peter, James, and John witnessed Jesus changing forms, but perhaps they are the ones who experienced a metamorphosis on the mountaintop. Jesus, after all, had always been who he was. In seeing Jesus in a new light, the eyes of the disciples were opened to a truth that had always been there, and it changed them. It transformed them. Dare I say that they too were transfigured?

The Transfiguration revealed Jesus in the fullness of his identity, human and divine. Likewise, our own moments of transfiguration are about living our lives, and sharing in others' lives, with a renewed sense of understanding, truth, and love, in which we see clearly what was always there. We see our sisters and brothers, all

our siblings, as the face of Christ, the image of God, and we see ourselves in that same light. When we see the truth of God's love in the new light that shines through us all, we experience Transfiguration.

Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in a new light that revealed what had always been there. The Child of God who invites us to follow in the Way of the Cross, and in doing so, to see ourselves as fellow children of God. And the Way of the Cross leads to the new life of Easter. The journey Jesus took toward the Cross, and the one that he invites us to walk with him on, is the path of love. "This is my Son the Beloved." It is love that gives new light to Jesus and to the disciples, and it is love that propels Jesus forward on his mission to the cross and to the empty tomb.

When we love and are loved, we see the truth of what is always there, but that we do not always see at first glance—that God, who is love, dwells in each and every one of us. Jesus, the Child of God, the Incarnate One, was dazzling not only in light on a mountaintop but in the love he showed in life, death, and resurrection to new life. The Transfiguration is a sign of Christ's unveiling as the personified manifestation of God's love in this world, as divinity enfleshed, as love incarnate, God's love among us. As we open ourselves up to the all-embracing love of God, we find that we were always beloved.

This love is not all the candy hearts and flowers of Valentine's Day, as nice as those are. If you read just past today's section of the gospel, Mark gives us an example for how that light of love manifested from Jesus. After coming down the mountain, Jesus heals a boy suffering from what we might today diagnose as epilepsy. Like Jesus, after experiencing moments of Transfiguration, we have to come down from the holy mountain and get back to work in the world. We love by serving one another.

The miracle of the Transfiguration was not only limited to Jesus shining with dazzling light on a mountaintop two thousand years ago. It was something shared in community, with Peter, James, and John, and it changed them as much or more as it changed Jesus, and it led them into new ministry in the world when they came down the mountain. And the miracle of the Transfiguration is not limited to one moment in time. It continues today, as we find ourselves transformed by God's light that shines within us. We see that inner light most clearly when we share it with others. Jesus shines his light of love upon us, and in turn, he invites us to share our light with all the world.

*This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*

The miracle of the Transfiguration is not only that Jesus is God's beloved child, but so are you. So are we all. You are loved. Let your light shine.

Amen.