

## Sermon for February 23, 2020 – “A Window Into God”

Transfiguration Sunday, Year A – Texts: Matthew 17:1-9

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There are times in our lives when we look around and wonder, “Is this all there is?” Sometimes it’s just a passing question, other times it’s for a season, a certain period in our lives. For some it can last a very long time. We look at our life, our circumstances, and we want more. There’s a restlessness, a searching and longing for something else. Some may call it a mid-life crisis. It can make us do crazy things; this searching and seeking. We get a new job, a new car, a new relationship. Maybe we take up a new hobby, go on a trip, or work extra hours. But not much changes. It’s not about the circumstances of life. It’s about us. This restlessness, this desire for something more, this – whatever you want to call it generally means that we’ve been living life at the shallow end of the pool. Life and relationships have become superficial. We’ve been skimming across the surface. In some ways life at the surface is easier, more efficient, encouraged and rewarded by much of the world today. It fails, however, to see and experience that the world is already transfigured, and that creation is filled with the divine light.

Life on the surface keeps us judging the circumstances. We look at our circumstances as a picture. If it’s pretty, if it’s pleasing, if it shows us what we want to see then God is good, and life is as it should be. When we don’t see what we want then we often look for a new picture. The restless searching, the longing for more, the desire for meaning are not, however, usually answered by changed **circumstances**. No, the answer is found in **depth, intimacy and vulnerability**; the vulnerability that happens as part of the journey **inward**, the honest journey deeper into **ourselves**. Because the truth is, and this is important as we begin Lent in a few short days, we do not need to see new things. We need to see the same old things with **new** eyes. We do not need to hear a different voice. We need to hear the same old voice with different ears. We do not need to escape the circumstances of our lives. We need to be more **fully present** to those circumstances. When this happens life is no longer lived at the surface. These, you see, are the transfigured moments. These are moments when the picture of our lives becomes a window into a new world, and we come face to face with the glory of God.

Most of us, I think, seek God in the circumstances of life. At least, I would hope so. We want God to show up, be present, and do something. This is the God who does. This is the God described in Mark’s gospel up to the point of today’s reading. We might think about this as the first part of the spiritual journey. It’s the journey of discovering God in the circumstances. This is what the disciples in our reading have been doing. So far, in Mark’s gospel they’ve seen Jesus cast out demons, heal Peter’s mother in law, and cure the sick of Capernaum. He’s cleansed the leper and made a withered hand new and strong. Paralytics now walk, the blind see, and thousands are fed. This is the God about whom people talk. This is the God that gets “likes” and “shares” on Facebook. The God who has Twitter buzzing. The God who breaks the Internet.

At some point we must, however, begin to discover the God who is **beyond** the circumstances. This is the God who **is**. The great “I AM.” This is the second part of the spiritual journey. Jesus is leading Peter, James and John, up the mountain to discover the God who is beyond circumstances. Here their pictures of life’s circumstances will become windows by which they move into the depths of God’s life, God’s light, and God’s love. There on the mountain they saw Jesus “...**transfigured before them and His clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.**” The cloud overshadowed them, and the Father’s voice spoke of His beloved son. Peter wants to build dwelling places. He wants to frame Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. “**It is good for us to be here,**” he says. He wants to preserve it. He wants to take a picture. Pictures, however, are static. On the Mount of Transfiguration our pictures of life’s circumstances become windows through which we step into a new world, a new way of seeing, a new way of hearing, and new way of being. That’s what happened for Peter, James, and John. Jesus did not suddenly light up and become something He was not. No, their eyes were opened and focused so they could see Jesus as He had always been. The voice in the cloud was not new. Their ears were opened, and they heard the voice that spoke Creation into being and is still speaking. The transfiguration is as much about them as it is about Jesus.

Whenever our picture of life’s circumstances becomes a window into new life, we stand in a transfigured moment. Circumstances haven’t changed. **We** have changed and that seems to change everything. Those transfigured moments are all around us. Every one of us could tell a story about stepping back from the picture of our life, seeing with new eyes, listening with different ears, and discovering a window that opened into another world and another way of being. Maybe it was the day that you revealed something to another person, something that you had carried for years. In telling this picture of your life, perhaps one of guilt, regret, shame or doubt, resentment, or a long-held grudge, became an open window through which you stepped. The darkness gave way to light, the chains fell off and grace was present and palpable.

I remember a day just after my father died. Jane and I had gone back to Pittsburgh for the funeral in which I had taken part. I had returned to the church I was serving and on the first Sunday back one of the young people approached me and said, “I’m sorry you lost your father.” I was struck by this and I paused for a moment then smiled and said, “I didn’t lose my father. I know exactly where he is.” The picture of death and loss had become a window through which I stepped into the mystery of life, hope, and resurrection.

For those of you who are parents think about the day you held your child for the very first time. Yes, it was a picture of a newborn, but it was also a window through which you stepped and were forever changed. You experienced a new vocation as a parent. You became a part of the mystery of creation. The Lord’s glory surely shone as much in your hands that day as it did on the mount of Transfiguration 2,000 years ago.

I remember speaking once with a man who was dying. It happened while I was at Hershey Medical Center in the summer of 2007. I can't believe that I'd forgotten about the conversation, but I was reminded of it after recently coming across the verbatim that I'd written as part of the requirements for my clinical pastoral work that I completed the year before I graduated seminary. A verbatim requires you to recall what happened in a pastoral encounter and to assess it from a theological perspective. I'll spare you most of the details, but I remember that in the brief time I spent with the man a number of things happened in a fairly short period of time. In the span of about an hour together we talked, laughed, cried, and sat in silence. He told about some "experiences." He had visions and heard voices. He asked me, "Is that real? Is it normal?" I was surprised by my response. "Yes, absolutely," I said. Not really knowing exactly or understanding fully what I was saying. I think I do now. I think that the picture of the man's life as one of cancer, pain, and suffering had become an open window through which he had looked. He began to understand that in the midst of his cancer he was already being healed. "There is so much more going on than we usually see or know," he said. "The tears and fear are real but just as real is the voice that says, "Oh my beloved child you are already okay. You will be more than okay."

And brothers and sisters, here's the thing, those windows are everywhere if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. And we often want to go back to those transfigured moments. We're tempted to build dwellings places for those moments. But, unfortunately, booths, tents, tabernacles, dwelling places will only keep us in the past. And to the extent we cling to the past, we close ourselves to the future God offers. So Jesus, Peter, James, and John came back down the mountain. They could not stay there but neither did they leave the mountain. They took it with them. It became a part of them. It was what would, in fact, carry them through some very difficult days. It would carry them through the passion and the crucifixion to the resurrection.

Transfigured moments change us, sustain us, prepare us, encourage us, and guide us into the future, regardless of the circumstances we face. They show us who we are. And who are we exactly? We are the transfigured people of God.

So, let us open our eyes and see a transfigured world. Let us open our ears and hear the transfiguring voice. Let us open our heart and live transfigured lives.

Is this all there is? With God – probably not. Let's open a window and find out!

Thanks be to God

Amen and amen.