



SAINT LUKE'S

THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION
YEAR A

EXODUS 34:29-35
2 PETER 1:13-21
LUKE 9:28-36
PSALM 99 OR 99:5-9

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN
AUGUST 6, 2017

✠ In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It's one of the events in the life of Jesus that we get to celebrate more than once during the cycle of the Liturgical Calendar, both on the last Sunday before Lent begins and on the 6th August. On this day we hear about Jesus praying with his disciples up on a mountain and while Jesus is praying, his clothes are changed to dazzling white and his face is shining beyond visibility. Moses and Elijah appear and the overshadowing cloud says, "This is my Son. My beloved. Listen to him." This is a rather significant event in Jesus' life, not because Jesus needs to know who he is in relationship with God, but rather it is God demonstrating to the disciples and to us how Jesus is in relationship with God.

To understand this holy moment in the life of Jesus, we have to backtrack. If you were to open a Bible to Luke 9:28, the Gospel Lesson would begin this way: "Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus, took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray." What's important is what happened about 8 days before: it's Peter's Confession of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus says, "Who do people say I am." And the disciples hem and haw a bit and finally Jesus says, but who do you say I am? And Peter says, you are the Messiah, the Christ. And Jesus tells them not to tell anyone. But Peter still has a problem. Peter says that Jesus doesn't have to suffer...that they can keep him from that if Jesus lets them. But Jesus then adds that to be his disciples requires obedience, denying oneself, taking up one's own cross, and following where Jesus leads. It is then eight days later that three of the disciples witness Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain.

After Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah ~ and after the disciples witness the Transfiguration, Jesus orders them to tell no one about what they know. These marvelous truths about Jesus have been revealed to the disciples ~ and they want to share what they have seen with others ~ and Jesus tells them no. Perhaps you can sympathize a little with the disciples. It's all of this amazing new revelation about God's relationship to Jesus as the Messiah ~ and Jesus issues a gag order! Why would Jesus bother showing them he is God's Son if they could not share that good news? I think Jesus told them not to tell anyone because those who were closest to him would be biased in his favor. I think Jesus wanted others to see for themselves through his own life, death, and resurrection that he is God's anointed one, God's Messiah, the Christ. If Jesus were to go around saying, "Yep that's me, I'm the Son of God, the Messiah, God's Anointed One!" people would have discounted him a lunatic at best or as a self-righteous egomaniac or something worse. No one ever knew he was the Messiah because of anything he said about himself. Rather his followers came to the realization that Jesus is the Christ because 1) of what he proclaimed about God's kingdom and 2) how he lived his life.

The Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain while he prays is for the disciples to get a glimpse into the relationship between God the Father and Jesus. It's not confirmation to Jesus about who he is; Jesus already knows who he is! This revelation of God in Jesus is for the faith of the disciples and for our faith as well. None of this is for Jesus' benefit, but for the faith of his followers.

The Transfiguration happens while Jesus is praying. And the dazzling white garments, the shining bright light, the appearance of Moses and Elijah, the

cloud that settles over them and the Voice from God affirming this is God's Son brings into focus for the disciples Jesus' identity, his suffering, and glory. Jesus has been telling his disciples that following him will not be easy; but that God's glory is on the other side of where Jesus leads. This whole account up on the mountain is to affirm for the disciples that Jesus is God's holy one - and that we can trust him and follow where he leads. We follow Jesus in the way of the cross, knowing that it won't be easy. The Christian life is not one of ease and comfort. We are called to live not for ourselves but for God - and in service to each other. The Christian life is one of service and self-denial in order that we might keep God as our first priority. There is so much that gets in our way between us and God: material things, wealth, power, privilege, and every kind of 'ism' imaginable. Christian spirituality and discipline is about letting those things go - and bringing God to the center focus of our lives. Maturity in the Christian faith is about walking where Jesus walked first - and now following our own path to death - but following Jesus into God's glorious light.

As it happens, on this date, the 6th of August 1945, on a bright and clear morning, a B-29 Superfortress bomber dropped the first atom bomb over Hiroshima, Japan. By some ironic twist, the dazzling white light of that atom bomb and the dazzling white light of Jesus' Transfiguration forever became linked on the 6th of August. Humanity will never forget the one; Christians dare not forget either. Humans have now shown that they can harness god-like power. We can even harness light for the purposes of darkness. Sometimes even the darkness looks like the light. That is why we as people of faith must continue to witness to the marvelous truth of God's light and power over and against the powers of sin, death, and hell.

When Jesus is on that mountain, Luke tells us that “the appearance of Jesus’ face changed and his clothes became dazzling white.” The King James Version says, “his countenance was altered and his raiment was white and glistening.” In many parts of the Old Testament, the mention of a person’s face or countenance is referring to their face as mirror of their heart and a manifestation of their relationship to God. So think about that any time in Scripture when one’s face or countenance is referenced, think about it as a mirror of their heart. Luke is showing for us in his Gospel that Jesus’ heart is pure and this light is the very light of God.

Over the course of this week while I have been thinking about what it is to follow the Way of the Cross, I remembered my time as a Curate in the Diocese of Rhode Island, where one of my duties was leading Stations of the Cross for Children every Good Friday. I inherited a Children’s guide that they had been using since the 1960s. I searched for a newer, better version for children ~ and, having searched high and low, I finally found one, written by a woman named Lucille Perrotta Castro. I’ll read you a sample from the second Station, where Jesus receives his cross:

The Second Station: Look at Jesus

When the soldiers put a big, heavy cross on Jesus' shoulders, Jesus doesn't fight with them or say angry words to them. He knows that he has to carry this cross a long way, and he knows that the way will be very hard for him at times. But Jesus knows that God is with him, and he asks God to help him to carry this cross, even though it is heavy.

Look at Your Heart

Have you ever had something happen that was very hard for you? Sometimes people are very sick, or someone in their family is very sick. Sometimes people do not treat others nicely. Sometimes we just can't have things the way we want them.

Take some time to look at what your heart is like when this happens. Then, when you see what your heart is like, show your heart to Jesus. See Jesus loving you when you show him what happens in your heart. When you are ready, you can ask Jesus to help make your heart more like his.

Jesus knows following him is not easy, but nourished by his sacraments and by his grace, he moves us from strength to strength. In Jesus' countenance at the Transfiguration, we see his pure heart that is shining bright with the light of God. Like Peter, John, and James, we are called to take up our cross and to follow Jesus where he leads, trusting and knowing that he is God's anointed one, the Christ. As we walk the way of the Cross, and as we grow in faith, I pray that we may continually show our hearts to Jesus that we may be strengthened to endure all hardships and that Jesus may make our hearts more like his.

Let us pray:

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
487 HUDSON STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEB SITE: WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG

EMAIL: INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG