

December 1, 2019 - Advent 1 - Communion

Hymns: 119 – Hope is a Star; 122 – O Come O Come Emmanuel; 529 – O Holy Father, God Most Dear; 775 – Sent Forth By Your Blessing

Scripture: Luke 9:28-36; 1 Peter 2:9-10

Sermon Title: Transfiguration, Transubstantiation, Transformation

Luke 9:28-36

Jesus took Peter, James and John and went off to the hill-side to pray. And then, while he was praying, the whole appearance of his face changed and his clothes became white and dazzling. And two men were talking with Jesus. They were Moses and Elijah—revealed in heavenly splendour, and their talk was about the way he must take and the end he must fulfil in Jerusalem.

But Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep and it was as they struggled into wakefulness that they saw the glory of Jesus and the two men standing with him. Just as they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is wonderful for us to be here! Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” But he did not know what he was saying.

While he was still talking, a cloud overshadowed them and awe swept over them as it enveloped them. A voice came out of the cloud, saying “This is my Son, my chosen! Listen to him!”

And while the voice was speaking, they found there was no one there at all but Jesus. The disciples were reduced to silence, and in those days never breathed a word to anyone to what they had seen.

South-east of Nazareth, south-west of the Sea of Galilee, and more or less smack in the middle of the big, flat Jezreel Valley, is a mountain. Not much of a mountain by Rocky Mountain standards, but a mountain of which we in Prince Edward Island would be mighty proud. At over half a kilometre in height, and standing all by itself, it is noticeable from pretty well any direction, and if you are brave enough to risk a taxi ride up the hairpin turns at break-neck speed with one of the fearless Bedouin drivers, the views of the Jezreel Valley, of the Carmel mountain range, and of the deep bowl of the Sea of Galilee are breathtaking. But that isn't why Jesus brought Peter, James and John with him, up the side of lonely Mount Tabor, all those years ago. He brought them for a view of something different altogether. He brought them for a glimpse of who he truly was. He brought them for The Big Reveal.

Luke has been building up to this moment for a few chapters now. It started with John the Baptist sending messengers with a question: “*Are you the one who is to come, or is there someone else?*” John was losing confidence in whether Jesus was the Messiah. To be fair, Jesus' own disciples – as well his own family - weren't 100 percent

sure either about Jesus either. What follows in quick succession, then, seemingly in answer to John's question, are five astonishing miracles: Jesus calms a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee; he delivers a man stricken by a violent storm of demons; he heals a woman plagued with an endless, terminal illness; he raises a young girl from death; and he feeds five thousand hungry souls on five loaves and two fish, with twelve baskets left over. Jesus, Bread of Life; Lord of Creation; Conqueror of the Spiritual Realms; Healer of the World; Victor over death itself. Slowly, gradually, miracle by miracle, Jesus is being revealed.

It is enough for even the disciples – or at least, stubborn Peter - to finally understand. Luke sets the scene for when the penny finally drops (Luke 9:18-20):

One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only his disciples were with him, and he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead."

Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Messiah sent from God!"

The music of the Gospels has been building to a crescendo, the curtain is flung aside, and finally, there it is: *"You are the Christ, the Messiah sent from God!"* The timpani rolls. The trumpets blare. But wait; there's more. The Big Reveal is yet to come.

Just eight days later, we're told, they arrive at the mountain. Jesus begins the climb, bringing with him the inner circle of Peter, James and John. It's been eight days of travel that brought them there, and the boys are dead on their feet, there's not a Bedouin taxi to be had, so when they reach the top and Jesus excuses himself to step aside and pray, he does so to the chorus of their snores.

But their sleep is interrupted by a blinding flash of light. There stands Jesus, transfigured before them, his face shining with the brightness of the sun, his robes gleaming a dazzling white.

As they were still processing this, hands shielding their eyes, mouths agape, who should join this vision but none other than Moses and Elijah, the very embodiment of all that had gone before, the Law and the Prophets made flesh; Moses, whose own face had shone with the reflected Glory of God; Elijah, who had been taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. Yet both now stood in the brilliance of the presence of Jesus, revealed as he truly was; Jesus, not reflecting God's Glory, but Jesus, himself the very Glory of God.

"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see," we sing at Christmas, but up on the mountain, the

veil came off, and the unfiltered light of the *“Immortal Invisible God Only Wise, In Light Inaccessible Hid From Our Eyes,”* was hid no more. And Peter, James and John were caught full in the blinding power of it all. It is as though they saw him – as though they saw Jesus – for the very first time.

And they finally realize, for the very first time, just who it is that walked in their midst. Shared their food. Helped with the fishing. Sat with their families. Healed their sick. Today, for Peter, James and John – and maybe, even, a little bit for Jesus himself – maybe, even, to remind himself of just who he is underneath these itchy clothes, this layer of dust – now, today, the veil comes off, the curtain is pulled aside, the lights come on, and we, through the eyes of Peter, James and John, see Jesus as he truly is, for who he truly is. Changed from Glory into Glory. Transformed.

God isn't finished with his revelation to Peter, James and John that day; nor is he finished with us. Listen: *“While he was still talking, a cloud overshadowed them and awe swept over them as it enveloped them.”* And not just any cloud – the cloud of the presence of the Glory of God, the cloud which had hovered over the face of the deep at the creation of the world, the cloud that led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, the cloud that descended upon the Holy of Holies, the cloud known as the Shekinah Glory of the Presence of the Lord.

And from this cloud, The Voice. The Voice which spoke, and brought light from darkness, life from dust, The Voice who said *“I am that I am,”* The Voice at which the mountains tremble and the thunder quails. And The Voice says: *“This is my Son. Whom I have chosen. Listen to him!”* John the Baptist had asked the question: *“Are you the one who is to come, or is there someone else?”* And now, five astonishing miracles and voice from heaven itself gives the unequivocal answer: *“This is my Son. Whom I have chosen. Listen to him!”*

And with that, it is over. The cloud parts; the light dims. There sits Jesus, alone; dusty robe and sandals; the Jesus they always knew. Thought they knew. Until now. Now they know just who Jesus is. Now, they know, there is a glory hidden there – the Glory of God in the Highest. *“The disciples,”* we are told – and this is a first for Peter – *“were reduced to silence.”*

Peter, James, John; at last they saw Him for Who He Is. The splendour is there for us to see, as well, for we, through Worship, Gospel, Sermon and Song, have beheld the Resurrected Jesus – Christ in all his heavenly glory. But unlike the disciples, blinded by first exposure, our eyes have adjusted, our aperture narrowed, so that we have largely lost the sense of dazzling majesty, of wordless wonder; overexposure has caused us to

forget just who Jesus is; in an astonishing reversal, in an act of unparalleled conceit, we think we are doing God a favour when we show up in church, rather than recognise the incredible privilege it is to walk through these doors and enter into the house of God, to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, to offer praises to Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But today, we have help. Today, this morning, we have tangible reminders of the presence of Jesus among us, in the bread and wine of Communion. For in this sacrament, we are reminded of the Real Presence of Christ. The church, over many centuries, has tried to convey this sense of Real Presence in various ways. Our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters speak in terms of “Transubstantiation,” meaning the elements of bread and wine are transformed, not in appearance but in substance, into the Real Body and Blood of Christ. Our Lutheran colleagues, rejecting this, point to the Presence of Christ being “in, under around and through” the bread and wine, while remaining as they are. What is it we believe?

We believe that the Real Presence of Christ is not in, under, around and through the elements, but in, under, around and through us; we who gather in the name of Jesus, to hear the words of Jesus, to sing the praises of Jesus, to share the sacrament together. As we gather, Christ is present among us, the love of God surrounds us, the Holy Spirit is alive within us, as together we receive in faith.

And so we believe that it is not the bread and wine that is transformed; it is we who are transformed; it is we, as together we partake, who are joined together and lifted up to God, transformed into the Brothers and Sisters of Jesus, Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, Servants of the King.

This Sunday – this First Sunday in Advent – may our eyes be opened, may our hearts be prepared, to see him as he truly is; King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. As you partake, allow the Holy Spirit to work a transformation in you. May your eyes be open to who you, in Christ, have become. No less than Peter, witness to the Transfiguration of Jesus, speaks of the transformation in us (1 Peter 2:9-10):

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Thanks be to God. Open your eyes, your minds, your hearts, your hands; receive the gift of Glory and Grace. Amen.