

Series: The Body of Christ

Sermon: The Face of Christ - Transfiguration

Mark 9:2-11

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.

And they asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.”

Do you ever say things before you think about what it is you are saying? Those times when you have prescribed sayings and phrases that make up most of our casual conversations? Standard responses for standard situations. When we greet people, we say “Good to see you” or “how are you doing?”. When people leave, we say “take care” or “Have a nice day”. When something doesn’t happen the way we wish, we say “Maybe next time”. When something goes well for someone else, we say “congratulations” or “good job.” A lot of people can carry on a conversation with these prescribed statements and pretend their listening. A while back, I received a phone call. On the other line was a woman who was looking for a pastor to do their outdoor wedding. She’s not a member of this church, found me online. I’m on Craigslist - how tacky is that! She was shopping around, looking for an officiant. We talked for about 2 minutes. Then she asked if a certain date was open on my calendar. Unfortunately, I noticed that there was another wedding scheduled for that day. I told her the date that she requested is already booked. She explained that that date was the only one open for them and apologized for taking my time. I said that I was sorry. Before we hung up I said the prescribed phrase “maybe next time”. Click. It took about a minute for me to understand what I just said. “Next time you get married - think of us!” I did not mean it the way it sounded. I hope that she did not catch it. There are days that I am not aware of what I am saying. This morning, I want to talk about perceptions. How we view ourselves. How we view each other. And I want to do that by using our scripture that was read today.

Our Gospel lesson this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark, the first Gospel that was written. It is a story that has confused me for the longest time. I never saw the big deal about it. He was transfigured. Great. He was transfigured. So what? Why should I care? Why the hoopla? Why is this important? I’ve never had

anyone come up to me and say, "Jesus was Transfigured!" Finish this for me: We sing, "Go tell it on the Mountain that Jesus Christ _____". Was born! Yes, we get a lot of songs about his birth. Try this one: Christ the Lord is _____. Yes, the resurrection gets a lot of songs. Because He Lives, I can face tomorrow! For whatever reason, we don't get a lot of transfigure songs. It just doesn't have the same pop. Amazing Grace how sweet the sound, Because Jesus face did glow. Doesn't sound convincing. Silent Night, Holy Night, Jesus's clothes, very bright. Don't think its going to happen. Let's take a look at the story in question. Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a mountain top, where they were by themselves. It doesn't say, but many guesses are that it is Mt. Tabor in Israel. It's an isolated little hill all by itself, without any other mountains around it. Mt. Tabor might sound familiar to your portlandia ears, for we have a Mt. Tabor here in the city. Our own Mt. Tabor was named by a pioneering religious family who thought that our Mt. Tabor looked a whole lot like the Mt. Tabor of Israelite fame - a hill out there by itself. That family was the Kelly family, out of Kentucky, a pastor in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In those days of the Methodist Church, it had split because of the slavery issue. The Methodist Episcopal Church in the North, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which was in the South. This particular pastor, even though he was on the south side of the issue, had a lot of misgivings about slavery and didn't like where the church was heading. So he packed up his family and headed west before the Civil War. They made it out to Portland in 1848. It was a thriving town then, just over 500 people. He named the hill Mt. Tabor. His daughter married a captain John Kern, and this pastor built the famous Kern house for his daughter and son-in-law. Another son, Richmond, is the namesake of the Richmond District of Portland. Another kid became sheriff and legislator. Another daughter married Judge Marquam - for whom Marquam is named. These people are really connected to us! Rev. Clinton Kelly eventually settled down in the big city of the time, a place called Oregon City. All in all, he had 15 kids, three wives. (The first two wives had passed away). It all started with a move out west because of the issue of slavery that weighed on his conscience. Our Mt. Tabor, however, is part of a volcano, the one in Israel, however, is not. For your trivia today, there are only four cities in America that have volcanos within the city limits. Portland and Bend Oregon are two of them. One could probably guess another, think Hawaii: Honolulu. And of course, how could you forget the last, Jackson Mississippi, that hotbed of geological action. Jackson, really?

OK, back to Jesus. The scriptures say that he was "transfigured" before them. His clothes became dazzling white, brighter than anyone could possibly bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, two important people from the Old Testament. Dead people, dead for hundreds of years dead, to be sure, but important people. It reminds me at little of Star Wars, when a jedi dies, their soul still kind of lingers and you see them hang around at important events. Moses and Elijah, conversing with Jesus - about what we have no idea. If you remember your Bible, Moses led the people around the desert for 40 years, and passed away right before they entered the promised land. God wouldn't let Moses into the promised land, he died on a mountain top overlooking the Promised Land, but he wasn't allowed to cross over. Well, Mt. Tabor is in the Promised Land, so Moses did reach it, but only as an Angel, or Spirit, or Jedi, whatever he was. Jesus also had the three disciples with him. In the book of Mark, the disciples are the Abbot and Costello's of the land - not the sharpest knives in the drawer. They bumble around. If you read the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples are smart people, they get things done, they understand what was going on, but Mark shows the other side of the disciples. The not-so-bright side, if you will. They never quite understand. Peter says "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Lets put up a couple of tents, we can stay here for a while, have a campfire, we can talk about the good old days, this will be a good male-bonding experience." Then a cloud enveloped them and God's voice came from above "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" And then they were left alone. Moses and Elijah were gone. Everything looked just as it did before. Jesus, Peter, James, and John were on a mountain top as if nothing had happened. And I used to think, big deal! Jesus had a bright and shiny moment for a second. What were they talking about, Jesus, Moses and Elijah? We never find out. And I never understood what had happened to Jesus and why it mattered. Did Jesus change? Was he different now that he had been transfigured? Is he now more holy? Does he have more power? Does he have the support and recommendation of Moses and Elijah, something that he didn't have before? I don't think so. But without something happening to Jesus, the story is

inconsequential. Who cares.

But that's when it hit me. Granted, this is my own opinion, other pastors might disagree with me on this, but I don't think anything did happen to Jesus on that mountaintop. Oh sure, the spotlight hit him for a moment, and he spoke with the prophets of old, but he wasn't any different. The same Jesus that walked up that mountain was the same Jesus who walked down that mountain. Nothing about him was different. But, there was a transfiguration that did take place, and it didn't happen to Jesus. To Peter, James and John, something did happen. They were the ones who were transfigured. They were the ones who were changed by the whole experience. Sure, they had witnessed previous miracles of Jesus - walking on water, feeding the 5,000, healings and other acts of someone divine, but this was the first time that the Disciples get an understanding that Jesus is the real thing, he is who he says he is - the son of God. Jesus had not changed, but the Disciples saw him differently. He was the same Jesus before the transfiguration as he was after, but it was the disciples who were different.

I am sure, to each of us Jesus is different. For some, he might be a great teacher and wise sage. To others, he is the Son of God, the savior of the world. To another, he might be a close confidant and friend. He comes in many different forms depending upon our need. To me, he is what I need him to be at my moment of need. He is my friend when I feel alone. He is my hope when I have sorrow. He is my pal when I celebrate, he is my teacher when I need instruction. Jesus is all of these things, and yet he is still the same. It is I who changes from day to day. And we all have those moments. We all have our transfigured moments, when we understand something that we did not see before. Paul, John and James came down that mountain with a new awareness, something that could not be erased.

So I ask you today: Who is Jesus to you? Has he affected your life in anyway? I guess there is one Transfiguration song, and it's just a little reference, but I believe that it sings volumes about what the Transfiguration really is: It's from the Battle Hymn of the Republic, out of the Civil War, about how Jesus can change our minds, affects our opinions, cause us to think more critically. "In the Beauty of the Lillies Christ was born across the sea, with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me; as he died to make men holy let us die to make men free, our God is marching on."

We are changed. We don't change the Gospel, the Gospel changes us. A Methodist pastor in the South gets changed, moves west and transforms a city. I pray tha you all have a transfiguration moment. When you see Jesus in a different light than before. He calls to us. He challenges us. He teaches us. He disciplines us. He loves us. This story was written, not for us to learn about Jesus, but so we can be changed by Jesus. That we might have our own transfiguration. As those who are transformed by the power of God through Jesus, we have the power to transform the world. So if I close out the sermon with my favorite line, And the people of God said, will the congregation say, Maybe next time? Or with they say Amen? Let me find out: We have the power to change the world. And the people of God said, Amen.