

## **Transfigured and Transformed**

Rev. Katherine Schofield | Sunday, February 14, 2021

When you have a story like the one we heard today, you can't ignore the big theme. Jesus goes up on a mountain with three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John. And they get to the top and something happens to Jesus. He changes. He begins to glow with this heavenly light, and Moses and Elijah appear with him. And a voice speaks out, "this is my son...listen to him".

Theologians call what they saw the Transfiguration of Jesus. And, transfiguration is really just a fancy word that theologians made up that really just means this: change. They saw Jesus change. And it was like nothing they had ever seen before.

But, for the disciples, that wasn't the end of the story. Because this Transfiguration story is about the disciples as much as it is about Jesus, and it's also about you, and about me.

Jesus took them up there that day because there was something he wanted them to see. He wanted to show them something that would change their lives. And when Peter and John and James saw it, things did change.

They already knew Jesus was something special. They wouldn't have followed the guy up the mountain if they hadn't. And when they got to the top, Jesus showed them who he was. Jesus didn't change in any real, fundamental way. Only his appearance did, but for the first time they looked at him and they were able to see him as he had always been. For the first time they understood that this was the son of God.

We all have different spiritual experiences. Some of us have mountaintop moments where we really see things clearly for the first time, and we stand on that mountain and know that everything has changed.

But others of us don't have that big, dazzling experience with the light and the voice from heaven. But we have a still, small voice that speaks to us and gradually pulls us in the right direction. Maybe over the course of years, we come to be convinced that we are called to follow the path of Christ. We become changed people.

So where is transfiguration happening for you? Where have you seen Jesus in a new light? Where have you felt God's love like you've never felt it before? Where have you felt convicted that there is a better way?

Put more simply, what amazing thing have you seen and immediately known that you would never be the same again?

We all have those moments. Moments where we know we want to do better, and we are trying. Moments where we have seen how things could be, and are ready to make the changes in our lives necessary to get there. Moments where we see the promise of new life, and we are ready to claim it. But the hard part is that in order to do that work we don't always get to stay on the mountaintop with Jesus and the glowing light.

When the disciples were coming back down the mountain, do you think any part of them wished, on some level, that they could un-see what they just saw? Because once they saw that change, once they realized that they couldn't help but follow this man Jesus from now on, they must have realized that they had been changed too. They had to know that their lives were about to be completely rearranged, and that nothing would ever be the same again. It must have been incredible, and terrifying all at the same time.

Civil Rights Hero John Lewis, told a story that was about his own transformation. When he was in early high school in a segregated school in rural Alabama, with few resources, his uncle took him to New York state for the summer. And for the first time in his life, he saw blacks and whites living, working, shopping and eating side by side. He saw educational opportunities that he didn't know were there for him. He saw a future he had never imagined in rural Alabama.

But then, at the end of the summer, he had to go back home to Alabama. Back to where he was treated as less than equal. And for the first time he really understood what segregation did. It must have felt like going back in time. But it was that experience of going and seeing another way, and then coming back and knowing that things could be different, that John Lewis credited with giving him the desire to push for change. It was the catalyst for all he would later do in his life.

I tell you this story because it's a powerful example of how sometimes - once we see what is possible - we are never the same again. And sometimes we can do nothing other than go back down into the valley and do the tough stuff to make it happen. We have to have the hard conversations. We have to put aside the things that are tying us down. We have to decide what fears we won't let control our lives anymore, and then we have to decide again and again, day after day. And we can't lose sight of what we saw up there on that mountain.

That's how you know the transfiguration has really taken place. That's how you know you have changed. Because even when you stumble, you know that there's a better way. And you have no choice but to stand back up and keep moving forward. That's how you know that what you saw up there on the mountain changed you.

In some ways this year of Pandemic has been a mountaintop moment. We have, each of us, been changed in many ways. We have seen so clearly what a big difference there is between caring for one another, protecting one another and living with disregard for our neighbors. We can recognize more clearly systems that put the health and welfare of certain populations before the health and welfare of others. We've come to realize that service professions are essential

professions and that - wow do teachers work hard! We've taken more walks and done less driving. We've also seen what it can mean for communities to pull together, how we can be intentional in showing caring and kindness towards one another even when challenges get in the way. We've come to cherish time with friends and family in a new way. There are so many ways in which we have been changed, in which we have glimpsed what is really important. Now - as we begin to descend back down the mountain - the task is to hold fast to the things that really matter, and build the world we want to see.

As we begin this season of Lent, we are in a time of transformation. We are in a time of getting ready for Easter. And, Lent, if you let it, can be a time of great personal transfiguration. It can be the time when we remember that mountaintop experience when we really saw God's love in Christ for the first time, and we commit to living a life worthy of it. Not a perfect life. Not a life without struggles. But a life that has been touched by God's love, and that could then never be the same again.