Transfiguration

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Transfiguration. As you may have noticed, this is a Sunday that we celebrate every Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Now this story is quite significant. It’s a story that is found explicitly in all three of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke and is mentioned in the Gospel of John. Needless to say this is an important passage. There are only a handful of stories that are commonly found throughout the Gospels and this is one of them. Now I have to be honest with you. I never understood this passage. I never understood why it was so important. I mean why are we reading this passage when there are so many miracles and parables that we could be reading instead? And I have to say I didn’t have an idea about how to write this sermon until I looked up the word transfigure. The dictionary definition of transfigure is to “transform into something more beautiful or elevated.” Now I’m sure that makes sense. Clearly Jesus was, at this moment, present in His full glory. The three disciples saw Jesus just as Moses had seen God on top of the mountain, in the fullness of his glory. They were able to witness Jesus in his true divine state. They even heard the voice of God. Not only that, they saw two additional figures. Two very important and pivotal Old Testament figures, Moses and Elijah. And in haste Peter sought to keep them with there. It’s clear that Peter didn’t necessarily understand what was happening but he knew that whatever it was, whatever was happening, he should do whatever he could in order to prevent it from stopping.

That was rather shortsighted I think. While he may have seen Jesus in his full glory at this moment, surely he eventually knew that Jesus would not be able to be in his full glory for very long. And surely he knew that if Moses and Elijah came down the mountain with them it would bring up some serious questions. Not to mention that Jesus had already spoken of the things that were about to happen, the things that we will be awaiting throughout the Lenten season. I think Peter’s actions here are a representation of ourselves. We are shortsighted. We get caught up in what we can do to keep the things of this world. We try to do things that will make our lives easier and better. Our elections are a perfect example of this and after all this is a midterm year. Candidates will be attempting to woo and convince us into voting for them. And I’ve noticed a pattern over the course of the past few election cycles. The platforms have become more about what the candidates are going to do for the individual rather than what can be done for the whole. The wants of the individual have usurped the needs of the whole. Instead of becoming an independent society we have become completely dependent. We have become a society that rejects the gifts that God has given us and instead we succumb to convenience. We try as hard as we can to make life on this earth as easy as possible and in doing so we lower ourselves. We make it so that we cannot function on this earth as God intended. God has intended for all of us to use our gifts and talents to the fullest of their ability, not to allow them to waste away. Yet the world does what it can in order to draw us away from that. The world does what it can to make us as lazy as possible. We tell ourselves, “Oh I’ll get to it later”, but we don’t. And sometimes we don’t even have the intention of getting to it later. The world attempts to get us to look at ourselves conveniently too. Every time we do something we aren’t supposed to we try to rationalize it. Surely someone out there has done something worse than this. I know I’ve heard myself saying that, trying to rationalize the wrongs that I’ve done. I think that this might have something to do with what Peter was saying. Maybe he was trying to make it so that he, and the other disciples that were with him, would have three of the most knowledgeable people pertaining to the mysteries of God explain the events that had transpired ever since they had begun to follow Jesus. Instead of waiting and being patient, he wanted the explanation right away. Of course if he had an understanding of the things that had happened and the things to come it would have made life for him way easier.

But Jesus knew that was not something that could happen. If Peter knew what would happen at the end of the Lenten season, if Peter knew his teacher and mentor was to be crucified, then he certainly would have set out to prevent it. That was not something that could happen if God was to make his creation whole again. The mission of Jesus was not something that could be done the easy or convenient way. And it is for our sake that Jesus took the way with no shortcuts. It is for our sake that Jesus withstood the beatings and crucifixion. And it is for our sake that God chose to display his full glory not just on mountain tops, but on the cross as well. For when we think of the true glory of God isn’t this it? Isn’t this the culmination of all that God has promised throughout the generations? Here I would like to share a theory I have. I see the transfiguration as a significant event because of the prophecy that it holds. Now you might be thinking, “Prophecy? There are no prophetic words spoken here.” Well no they aren’t here. But surely we have heard the saying from Revelation, “**These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb**.” Did you know that passage refers to you? Did you know that you too are characters in the Bible? Yes we are all characters in the bible, for who else could that passage be referring to? You see now we are transfigured. Let me recall you to the definition, “to transform into something more beautiful or elevated.” We have been transfigured, and we have been transfigured through Jesus Christ. We have been elevated to be numbered among God’s children through our Baptism, and we have been elevated by the difficult and painful sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross. Now our robes certainly cannot match the fullness of the glory of God, but they sure will be a dazzling white. Now I, being a fellow northerner have seen a lot of white in my life, snow, white outs at Beaver Stadium, but surely nothing that I or any of us have seen will compare with this. The sight of generations, multitudes, millions and millions of people, all wearing the robes that have been made stain free, pure white, through Christ’s precious blood.

The transfiguration is a difficult passage to figure out. It is a puzzling encounter, but surely it speaks to more than just the glory of Jesus on top of the mountain. Because it shows us that Jesus, the culmination of the Old and New Testament, is true God. And the work that we will witness over the course of the next six weeks will prepare us for Easter, when this church will be covered in white. When white flowers will adorn all the halls, and we should think back to this day, when we too learned that we have been elevated, we have been transformed into something more beautiful, because of Christ, and his willingness to do things that weren’t easy or convenient. But rather they were done the way they had to be, for the sake of the transfigured children of God. Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.