

“Looking Both Ways and then Walking to the Cross”

+ Transfiguration B +

2 Kings 2:1-12; 2Corinthians 4:3:-6; Mark 9:2-9

February 15,2015

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

The Gospel for today reads like a piece of Science Fiction. In fact that is the genre C.S. Lewis used to try to describe what happened on that mountain top in his Space Trilogy. Franz Kafka’s novella *Metamorphosis* written 100 years ago tells the story of a traveling salesman, Gregor Samsa, waking to find himself transformed into a large, monstrous insect-like creature. The cause of Samsa's transformation is never revealed, and Kafka himself never gave an explanation. The rest of Kafka's novella deals with Gregor's attempts to adjust to his new condition as he deals with being burdensome to his parents and sister, who are repulsed by the horrible, verminous creature Gregor has become.

The Gospel uses the word *METAMORPHE* to describe just what those sleepy-headed disciples saw. And if, as we believe, Mark’s gospel is actually the written preaching and memories of St. Peter who was literally there, even Peter must have had a hard time finding the words to describe it. “Dazzling white”—that’s not bad, but not quite good enough, so “such as no one on earth could bleach them,” which is quite a claim, but don’t you have a sense here, too, that Peter might have given up at that point and said, “Really, you had to be there.”

The very word “transfiguration” is problematic because it describes a sight never seen before a “change in form or appearance.” Jesus didn’t become a big bug – no, He appeared with two real people from the distant past of Israel: Moses and Elijah, one of whom was buried by God and the other who went up into the heavens in a fiery chariot. No wonder the disciples trembled and fell in awe of the light emanating from Jesus and these celestial beings brought out of eternity into their presence in the present.

I have a friend who loves flashlights – has a large number of them. For me, other than using a flashlight under the covers as a kid to keep reading a beloved novel or on hikes with campers for outdoor Ed. or youth retreats to keep them on the night hike path I prefer to be in the dark. You see, being a blue-eyed redhead I have a genetically enhanced ability to see in lower

light as well as a residual intense and piercing pain from bright light shining in my right eye after nearly going blind in that eye at 21. Reading this text the light is blinding - I don't think I'd have been able to behold the sight – just heard Jesus talking to Moses & Elijah and then heard the voice of God from the Shekinah/cloud of glory with my head on the ground and arms thrown up to cover them from the light of the indescribable metamorphosis looking up at last to see only Jesus – metamorphosis over, just Jesus.

Ah, but to see “just Jesus” means paying close attention to all we've experienced since December 24th. Today is the last day of the Epiphany Season, the season of God's “show and tell” that began with Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord. All of the Gospels we have read since January 6th were intended to reveal more and more about this baby born in Bethlehem. Today, outside of the spotlight of the Transfiguration, we are taking a look back at His Incarnation, the coming of the Eternal Word into human flesh and blood. Today we are *Looking Both Ways and then Walking to the Cross*. That is the purpose of the Festival of the Transfiguration.

We look back to the Incarnation and then further back, back to Moses and Elijah as they stood in the glow of Jesus' inner being shown forth in that dazzling light. Moses, dead for about 1,000 years, and Elijah, dead for about 800 years and yet, because God took them into His eternal presence, they are as alive, no even more alive, than ever, than we are today.

If you're having a hard time connecting with that, then forget about Moses and Elijah and think of your departed loved ones who died in the saving faith knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, now in their places as they rest in the eternal presence of God. Look back and know that they also, not just superstars like Moses and Elijah, but the ones you have known as mom or dad or husband or wife whom you have laid to rest are now in the nearer presence of our God in the company of the saints who live in the light of God.

That makes Transfiguration kind of practical, doesn't it, especially when you remember that the Scriptures promise that one day we will all be like Jesus because we will see Him as He is.

All of which is to say we not only look back, but we look ahead; ahead to the time when everything God wants done to redeem His creation is a reality and Jesus returns – not “just Jesus” who Peter, James and John saw after the metamorphosis ended but filled with the light of eternity - the floodlight of grace.

And now that we have looked both ways, now we are ready to walk with Jesus as He faced the cross. Two times already Jesus had told His disciples of His impending death, something both sad and incredible. And here in the middle with the cross in the very near future, Jesus, the real Jesus, the soon to be beaten up and crucified Jesus, is shown just for a moment in the glory that was His before He was born into this world and the glory to which He returned to after His resurrection.

This glimpse is given to pardon the pun, enlighten us, and to give us a foretaste – to anticipate that which will ultimately come but it did not come without a price which is why we look both ways and then walk through Lent to the Cross of Christ: we walk as He walked to a cross, death, resurrection and the new life that awaits beyond death. Eternal life where people like Moses and Elijah and Peter and James and John and even you and I will come face to face with God, no longer blinded by His light, but welcomed and embraced in this light that will go on forever, finally at home with Jesus, in the place where He had gone to make room for us.

This is where I generally say AMEN but, the longer I preach, the more I realize that except for funerals where I always challenge the listeners to think about their faith, not assuming all who are there have received that gift I seldom speak that kind of challenge on a Sunday as if everyone who walks through the door is strong in their Blessed Assurance. Today, in the blinding light of the Transfiguration I'd like to ask you to bow your heads and pray.

Lord, if there are some here who have never seen Your glory, give them a taste of Your goodness through your Word, in the comfort of Baptismal grace, in the feast we share at your altar and in the embrace of the people in this family of faith. If there are some here feel they reflect Your glory but dimly in their lives, kindle in their hearts a new flame of faith and love and assure them anew of your grace. Grant each of us Your passion to enter into the mess and muck of humanity, people in desperate need whether rich or poor, to meet their needs and bring the Good News of Your salvation into their lives. Grant us Your words and give us Your eyes to see

their needs. And whether in this life we stand on mountaintops or walk through valleys, give us a faith that is as constant and changeless as Your love for us which will never fail; through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. AMEN.