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The Transfiguration
Exodus 3:29-35
Psalm 99
2 Peter 1:13-21
Luke 9:28-36

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

Today we take a break from our regularly scheduled summer of parables to celebrate the Transfiguration.

You might be thinking, wait – this is something we celebrate the last Sunday before Lent – why now? And you'd be correct, we do celebrate Transfiguration Sunday as the capstone to the season after the Epiphany because it fits symbolically. But the actual date on the liturgical/church calendar for celebrating the Transfiguration is August 6 – and when August 6 falls on a Sunday, the Transfiguration takes precedence over the regular weekly lectionary.

So here we are today at the top of a high mountain with Jesus, Peter, John, and OUR James (known as the Greater in part because he was part of this select group on the mountain and later in the garden with Jesus).

Up on the mountain, in a scene that foreshadows the garden at Gethsemane, the disciples were weighed down with sleep as Jesus prayed. This time they managed to stay awake – and what they saw changed them as much as it changed Jesus.

Scripture tells us that Jesus' appearance changed and his clothes became dazzling white. The Greek word for this transfiguration is *metamorphoō*, the root from which we get metamorphosis.

What I think is interesting though, is that the metamorphosis in this story is less about Jesus and more about the disciples.

At his baptism, Jesus heard a voice from heaven telling him he was God's beloved. Here on the mountain, the divine voice is directed at Peter, John, and James: *This is my son, my Chosen; listen to him.*

Listen to him.

That's a loaded statement if I've ever heard one – the implication being that if you have ears to hear – you will have lips to tell, hands to serve, and a heart on fire. This mountaintop experience is a sign to the disciples that stuff's about to get real – and if they are going to walk with Jesus to the end they must not only change their lives (like they did when they dropped their nets to follow him), but be ready to be transformed.

Whether we meet God by the sea , in the desert, on the mountain, or on the road – we don't get to stay there.

It drives home the simple truth that **change is inevitable – transformation is not.**

The world is constantly changing. I'm not saying that we should be pushed to and fro by every shift that occurs – we need to always remember that God is our foundation – our anchor – our center – whatever metaphor you'd like.

But **how** we **respond** to change is what's at the heart of the story of the Transfiguration.

Do we sleep through it? Are we terrified of it? Does that terror close us off? Or is it the impetus for opening our hearts? Do we merely hear Jesus – or do we truly listen and then act?

There are countless ways we can mine this for personal spiritual development, but it's just as important to reflect on how communities experience change and transformation as well.

An example of this is a theme that comes up often in some of the online clergy groups that I'm a part of. It goes something like this: *I'm so frustrated by _____ and how it overlaps with Sunday morning worship. How do we compete with that?*

Now _____ can be anything: youth sports, 5Ks, family brunch – whatever, you name it.

At its heart, this lament is one rooted in change – the change in which Sundays are no longer a sacred set apart time – not just for Christians, but for the secular world.

I feel this pinch too, so I can commiserate with these posts – but only to a point. Because the fact is that the world has changed and is continuing to change – and it's not all bad. It is different though – and it's also an opportunity for transformation.

Change is not inherently good or bad – it is simply change – and just like with the Transfiguration – our response is the heart of the matter.

The clergy group lament, then, brings to mind this adage: when you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.

As Christians, we have historically held a place of privilege in the wider culture – and so the secular calendar has been our calendar.

It can feel like oppression – like a lament – that we are moving toward playing on a level field.

But the flip side of that – another response – is transformation: how can we faithfully listen to the Spirit and live into new possibilities?

As much as anything else, this is the work we are being called into as followers of Christ in this age.

We are called not to circle the wagons and turn inward to worship the ashes, but to look up and out – and indeed step outside our doors – so that we can pass on the flame of our faith.

How are we responding to the awesome transforming power of the Gospel? Where are we meeting the world with Christ's love? How can we continue to transform our community into one of deep spiritual groundedness and open hearts and open hands ready to serve?

These are questions for us all to ponder as we follow Jesus down the mountain and into the world, today – tomorrow – and in the days to come.

~ AMEN ~