

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
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February 27, 2022 (Transfiguration of Our Lord, Year C) 10am Confirmation version
Luke 9:28-36
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Exodus 34:29-35

Most of us, at some time or another, have had a transforming experience, a time when we recognized CLEARLY that our lives were about to be, or HAVE been FOREVER changed, times when we absolutely GLOW.

Have you ever watched a child open a card and find \$5.00?

Have you ever watched a teenager open the door after their first goodnight kiss?

Have you ever watched a high school senior open an acceptance letter from their first choice college?

Have you ever watched a dad when he walks his daughter down the aisle?

Have you ever watched a mother or a grandmother when they hold a new baby?

And TODAY, have you ever watched a parent when their child affirms their faith?

No words are needed, the look says it all, the glow speaks volumes – joy, awe, disbelief, completeness – every word is written on the face.

This morning's texts give us a glimpse of what it means to have a life changed forever...by the knowledge of and PRESENCE of GOD.

Actually, transformations are not the exception; they're the RULE. We are ALL BEING changed in our appearances, whether we PLAN to or NOT. We're all growing, getting older, getting wiser, getting GRAYER. It's a fact of life. To be alive is to be continually changing. The question IS: WHO are we BECOMING?

A bishop by the name Arthur Moore loved to tell the story of a man who had been away from his home church for many years, involved in all kinds of shady practices and criminal activities. But when he came back to his home church, he was ready to give his testimony. He stood up and said, "I'm so glad to be back in my own church, and I want to tell you that, while it's true that I have beaten my wife, that I have deserted my children, that I have stolen and lied and done all kinds of evil, and served several terms in jail, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that NOT ONCE, in ALL that time, did I ever lose my RELIGION!"

Now, if your religion is NOTHING more than an insurance policy for heaven, if it has NO effect on HOW you LIVE and how you treat OTHERS, then FIRST of all, you're missing OUT on life. And SECOND, you'd better check your motivation. Encountering God, TRULY ENCOUNTERING GOD, CHANGES us.

Look at Moses. Each time he went before the presence of the Lord and came back to the people, he was glowing, LITERALLY GLOWING. When you experience God, it TRANSFORMS you.

St. Paul says, "All of us, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the SAME image, from one degree of glory to another."

When I was YOUNG, I BECAME a Christian in high school, but it was in COLLEGE that I really FOUND myself, when my faith really took hold. I came home one weekend and saw an old high school classmate. While we were talking, she said, "Reggie, you look DIFFERENT. You look like a completely different PERSON." Others noticed it too. There was something about my faith, my encounter with God, that had PHYSICALLY CHANGED my appearance.

As St. Paul says, "Seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, (all of us) are being transformed into the SAME image (HIS image, the image of Christ) from one degree of glory to another."

I like that image of the mirror. I have a drawing, that I clipped out of a church newsletter years ago, of a small boy looking into a mirror, but the reflection he sees in the mirror isn't his own—he sees JESUS in the mirror, because Jesus lives inside him. As Paul writes LATER in 2 Corinthians (5:17): “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” We are being TRANSFORMED, REMADE in GOD'S image.

“Transformed from one degree of glory to another,” Paul says. “Degrees of glory? What degrees of glory?” you might ask. I think the first degrees are when we're young in the faith, when it first becomes our own, like these young men and women affirming their faith today. They are just BEGINNING to see the REFLECTION of God in the mirror. I think as we grow in the faith, we become more LIKE God. As we experience MORE of the joys and sorrows of life, and ENCOUNTER God IN those experiences, it changes us. EVERY TIME we EXPERIENCE God, it CHANGES us. Those who have lived THROUGH more are CLOSER to his image, TRANSFORMED “from one degree of glory to another.”

Now before you start feeling all high and mighty, let's consider who this IS, who we're becoming more like. In our gospel today, we see Jesus GLOWING in his transfiguration, but even in the MIDST of his glory, speaking with Elijah and Moses, we see what he's TRULY about. Because what they're talking about is what will soon happen in JERUSALEM.

Luke says this happened after “Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went ... to pray.” And while he was praying, “Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep.” Does that sound familiar? The same thing will happen in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’” God isn't ONLY reminding us of Jesus' baptism here. God says, “Listen to him!” Listen to the LAST thing Jesus says BEFORE this event: He said, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” And the FIRST thing he says after our reading is this: He says, “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.”

THIS is the person in the mirror, the person that LIVES INSIDE EACH of us, the person that we are BECOMING, the one who gave his LIFE for us. We are being transformed into HIS image. So, a life of faith doesn't mean being “holier than thou”; it means LOVING and SERVING OTHERS.

Like James and John and Peter up on that mountain, we too are weighed down with our worries and concerns. But THEY stayed AWAKE, and “SINCE they stayed awake,” they WITNESSED an AMAZING event.

You ELEVEN, today WE are witnessing an amazing event TOO. You are affirming your faith as your own, and becoming ADULTS in your journey of faith.

But it wouldn't be much of a JOURNEY if you STOPPED NOW, if you stopped WALKING with JESUS, and just PLOPPED down onto the spiritual couch. Jesus wants us STANDING on the PROMISES; not just SITTING on PREMISES.

So today, as you TAKE this AMAZING step, as YOU are TRANSFIGURED in our sight, I give you a challenge: LIKE those disciples on the mountain, STAY AWAKE. KEEP your eyes OPEN to SEE the HOLY MOMENTS and the TRANSFIGURATIONS SHINING in the faces AROUND you. And don't forget to look for the face of CHRIST, in the MIRROR. Amen.