

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

March 2, 2025 (Transfiguration of Our Lord, Year C)  
Luke 9:28-36  
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

The church calls this event the Transfiguration of our Lord. Jesus was "transfigured": his figure, his image, was transformed. The appearance of his face changed. His clothes changed. Jesus looked different.

Transfigurations have become big business today. I don't know anybody who doesn't want SOME kind of transformation, including me. The Facebook algorithm seems to think I need to change my diet. My doctor thinks I need to avoid stress. And many people work hard and spend a lot of money to GET transformations – a new face, a new look, a changed appearance. Or they just lie about it on social media.

Transfigurations ARE big business, because we are VERY AWARE of the face we present to the world. Sometimes the change isn't just in LOOKS but in our whole image – including our name.

A man named Issur Danielovitch Densky didn't like the image he thought his name projected, so he CHANGED his name to Kirk Douglas.

In the same way, Frances Gumm transfigured herself and her image into Judy Garland.

Archibald Leach became Cary Grant.

Aaron Schwalt became Red Buttons.

And would you have paid money to see Marion Morrison in the movies? Maybe, but Marion didn't take that chance; he became John Wayne.

Mark Vincent didn't think his name carried the tough guy image he wanted, but Vin Diesel did.

You may not have ever watched a movie starring Maurice Micklewhite, Ramon Estevez or Ilyena Mironov, but you surely have seen one with Michael Caine, Martin Sheen or Helen Mirren.

And your kids might not have ever listened to Stefani Germanotta, but Lady Gaga has sold millions of records.

In the Scriptures, SEVERAL people got new NAMES to go with their new LIFE: Abram became Abraham; Sarai became Sarah; Jacob became Israel; Saul became Paul; Simon became Peter, "The Rock."

Actually, when you think about it, transfigurations are not the exception; they're the rule. We are ALL being altered in the appearance of our face, our countenance. We are all growing, changing. We are all getting older, wiser, GRAYER. It's a fact of life. To be alive is to be CONTINUALLY CHANGING, transfigured. The QUESTION is: WHO are we BECOMING?

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." Encountering God, TRULY ENCOUNTERING GOD, CHANGES us. As Paul writes 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.

Now consider who this IS, WHO we are becoming more LIKE. Jesus gave himself completely for us. He gave his LIFE for us. And we are being transformed into HIS image. HE is the person in the mirror, the person that lives inside each of us, the person that we are becoming MORE AND MORE LIKE each day. And to be more LIKE our Lord, means to we DO what HE DOES TOO.

We see his glory on the mountain, but we were never meant to STAY up on that mountain. If you want to know who Jesus REALLY is, see what happens next. Jesus and the disciples and came OFF that mountain, and they came right down to the bottom of the VALLEY. They found a boy who was having epileptic seizures. In other words, they came down RIGHT into the PROBLEMS of REAL LIFE.

Henry Drummond, the Scottish theologian said, “It is not God’s DESIRE that we LIVE on the mountaintops. We only ascend to the heights to catch a BROADER VISION of the earthly surroundings BELOW. But we don’t LIVE there. We don’t tarry there. The streams BEGIN in the uplands, but these streams DESCEND QUICKLY to GLADDEN the valleys below.”

I like that image. The streams start in the mountaintops, but they come DOWN to REFRESH, to NOURISH, to GLADDEN the valleys below.

You and I experience the VALLEYS of life. You and I KNOW what HAPPENS down HERE, BELOW the mountain. It’s the REAL world, and REAL life. After the Sundays of life, there are always MONDAYS. You know, the TOUGH days of life. God’s glory is with us THERE too.

Jesus had His MOMENT of glory, but the REAL glory would come in a much DIFFERENT way. They needed to return to the REAL world, to a world that needs God’s mercy and grace. They needed to go back to the crowds, to the disease and dis-ease, to the oppression. And Jesus had to go back to the hatred and rejection that would SEND Him to the cross.

God’s power isn’t only found in transfigured images or miraculous moments; it’s found in the EVERYDAY OPPORTUNITIES we have to share God’s love and mercy with others. I’m SURE that the demon-possessed boy must have been dirty and ugly and wounded. It must have been horrific to witness a child out of control, hurting himself and throwing himself on the ground. The REAL glory was when GOD’S GRACE TOUCHED the needy ones, and brought healing and peace to a life of suffering. Jesus was MOST GLORIOUS when He was sharing the kingdom of God with those in need, when he was transforming those who NEEDED it the most, when he TRANSFIGURED OTHERS.

The SAME Jesus, who leads us UP to those spiritual HIGH places, ALSO leads us DOWN to the VALLEY, to CARE for the hurting, broken-hearted children; to MINISTER to the homeless; to BIND UP the wounds of a broken world, or simply to tend to the NEEDS of a brother or sister in Christ.

When you experience the mountaintop, don’t LEAVE BEHIND the valley below. Jesus is ALSO DOWN HERE in the VALLEY of the tears and fears of everyday life; Jesus is HERE in the nursing home; He’s HERE in the aching loneliness of the shut-in; He’s HERE in the guilt of the prisoner; He’s HERE in a family’s grief; Jesus is HERE WITH people facing ALL KINDS of DEMONS.

EXPERIENCE the mountaintop, yes (we ALL NEED that once in a while), but don’t forget the valley below. On the MOUNTAIN is where we SEE Jesus, but down HERE, in the VALLEY, is where we BECOME MORE LIKE him, SERVING OTHERS.

Later this week, we’ll gather once again in this place, allowing our foreheads to be marked with ashes in the sign of the cross. During the season of Lent, THROUGH our Lenten disciplines, we’ll be able to SIT AND DWELL IN THE PRESENCE of Christ. MAY our encounters with Christ LITERALLY SHINE through our faces. MAY WE be transfigured, transformed, and changed – into HIS image, by transforming the lives of OTHERS. As it turns out, transfigurations aren’t the exception; they’re EVERYTHING. Amen.