

Sermon: Transfigured and transformed
August 6, 20

...No prophecy ever came by human will,
but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit
spoke from God.

Good morning, St. Dunstan's! I am Leesa Lewis, and I am your new curate.

If you are new here at St. Dunstan's, I want to welcome you.

If you are new to the Episcopal faith tradition, I also want to welcome you.

Happy Feast Day of the Transfiguration!

Some of you may ask "What's a feast day?"

Like other faith traditions such as Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, Anglicans, and other liturgical traditions, we observe the church calendar, which is different from the Gregorian calendar, January 1 through December 31

or say the school calendar which usually goes from August thru May.

Or like most moms, you run on the laundry calendar, where you are washing clothes every day of the year.

Using the church calendar also called the liturgical calendar we observe feast days.

Some of you may not know what feast days are.

Every Sunday is considered a feast day because we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. You are aware of 2 feast days already, Christmas and Easter. In the Episcopal church, we celebrate 7 principle feast days which you can read in front few pages in the Book of Common Prayer.

At the heart of every feast is a celebration of the love. On major feast days, we celebrate the different dimensions of Jesus and the Gospel story. And if you have any questions about feast days, feel free... to ask Fr. Roman!

From our Epistle reading of 2 Peter, I want to focus this message from Peter's view point.

Remind me again who St. Peter is and why is he important:

Here's some things we know about Peter.

He comes from a fishing family. He had a brother named Andrew who was in the family business.

They both met Jesus at the same time while fishing. And decided to leave the family business and follow Christ.

We know that Peter was married because the three synoptic Gospels- Matthew, Mark and Luke share the story of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law.

Peter had his own issues. Often throughout the Gospels we find Peter speaking first then listening. He is someone I can really relate to.

Tradition has it that the Gospel of Mark is based largely from Peter's personal story.

Peter was part of Jesus' inner circle along with the Sons of Thunder, James and John.

Wherever Jesus goes, Scripture says: "Peter, James and John..."

Dramatic and traumatic things happened to Peter. He was the one who first to proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah. Then the trauma on that fear filled night when denied Jesus. He was an early witness of the miracle of the resurrection.

Peter was then beautifully restored by Jesus at a lovely sunrise breakfast on the beach.

St. Peter became a key leader in the early church where he worked selflessly sharing with the world the good news of God's love.

Through life, I have been gifted with an inner circle of friends. I hope the same for you. Think for a moment about some of your sweet friends who have been with you through thick and thin- special someone you may have rode the school bus with you or sat with at ball games: either on the bench or in the stands,

took care of you when you had a newborn so you could take a much needed nap, someone you called when you got 'the call' – whatever that may mean to you: the pink slip, the call from the doctor's office telling you the diagnosis.

Peter, James, and John were part of Jesus' inner circle. They were privy to certain insights, specific experiences. which brings us to today and the story of the Mount of Transfiguration.

New Testament accounts do not name the mountain upon which the transfiguration occurred; however, tradition holds to two possible sites: Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon.

Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James and John's very eyes. Jesus is joined with Moses and Elijah. Moses represents the law as he received the law of God in the form of the 10 commandments. Elijah represents the prophets because... he was the prophet. This was a time when there wasn't any technicolor, photoshop, camera filtering. Allow your mind to imagine with them seeing a dazzling brightness beyond anything they have ever experienced standing with the GOATs of their faith. G O A T- greatest of all time. Now that's dramatic and potentially traumatic.

I was recently read at book by Paul Zahl who describes our life as broken into thirds. His latest book, *Peace in the Last Third of Life*, caught my attention a few months ago. My colleagues in seminary were somewhat younger than me, they were unfamiliar with Dr. Paul. Zahl, who I knew was a retired Episcopal priest. I learned this fact from listening to his son, David Zahl's podcast, *Mockingbird*.

As I was discussing my sermon with Fr. Roman, I asked him if he ever heard of Paul Zahl (his name is just fun to say). Fr. Roman looks at me for a moment, then in his wonderful accent, "Leesa come over here," as he motions me to follow him. He points to his graduate diplomas, elegantly framed, hanging on the wall in his office and points to a signature. The Very Rev. Dr. Paul F. M. Zahl turns out to be the dean and president of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry and Fr. Roman knows him quite well.

I found that as a pleasant surprise.

Dr. Zahl has met with a lot of people in his 40 + years of ministry. One of the concerns in his latest book is for people to finish life with peace and hope. Like I said earlier, he describes life in thirds. Often there are traumatic events that happen in one's life early on that never get dealt with emotionally. Then in the second third of life, one is overwhelmed with surviving life itself. The building of a career, the raising of a family, navigating carpool lines and morning commutes, juggling eating healthy and exercising but trying to remember to have some self-care along with a bit of entertainment- movie night, ball games, and taking the family to the beach.

In the book, he recounts story after story of people he had known, at the end of their lives and their desire for reconciliation from a traumatic event which happened earlier.

From his vast experience, he suggests a process for one to experience peace rather than despair.

Early memories of pain or conflict are indelible and impress upon the soul. One of the biggest blocks to peace and hope in the last third of life is an unresolved, unhealed experience from a person's past; usually it is the far, distant past. It could have been a misunderstanding or a miscommunication. It could have been a childhood disease or a loss of loved one. Maybe it was a severe rejection or a blatant betrayal. You can fill in the blank with whatever 'it' is. These powerful emotions which are associated with trauma and are not dealt with continue to surface especially in the last third of life. Many people hide their pain and simply try to just move on.

Dr. Zahl encourages to **first** acknowledge the trauma. One reason for the 'excavation of the soul' is the fact that when buried hurts are brought to the surface, they often shrink in size in the shining light of compassion. As St. Peter says in v. 19 like a 'lamp for lighting a way through the dark, until the dawn comes, and the morning star rises in your minds.' (2 Peter 1:19)

I learned a new word from reading this book. Perhaps you already know this psychological term: **abreaction**.

Abreaction is a term for what happens when your suppressed emotions are enabled to come to the surface and be felt. When a person is holding onto pain from the past that has not been processed or even acknowledged, that pain is bound to surface.

Next, Dr. Zahl urges one to find someone who will **listen**. REAL listening means not interrupting you.

A real listener will **not interpret** or share their own experiences while hearing yours. They offer you the gift of just simply listening, compassionate listening. Most of the inner pain we carry can be extracted by the means of a gentle, listening ear.

Then Zahl notes there are certain things that are deeper than deep, like a teen tragedy or a childhood psychic wound needs healing from laying it all before God.

Zahl goes on to encourage all to **seek God and look to God's Supernatural Power** to provide you with much needed peace of mind.

Of course, there are situations one needs professional help. I do not negate that fact. But more often than not, much of our internal conflicts can be resolved from acknowledging the hurt, sharing it and praying about it. We feel free to share our physical pain and physical health with others but there still exists a stigma about sharing our mental pain and mental health.

In our epistle reading for today, Peter is near the end of his life. Sharing the truth of the experience of the transfiguration is paramount for him. Of all Peter experienced with Jesus, the transfiguration is the **only** event he refers to in his epistle writings.

In the transfiguration Peter sees Jesus' true identity as God's divine Son.

This divine identity comes from and also points beyond Peter's reality and beyond ours.

To behold the glory of God in Jesus Christ requires, above all, the kind of understanding that we call ...faith. And this FAITH is only made possible only through Christ's death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

It is with faith, by which Christians see that the human being Jesus is not merely human.

Peter desperately wants people to know the Transfiguration is based on an actual event and with real persons, not on mythical stories.

Peter's eyewitness and very personal reference lies at the center of the concern for the well-being and spiritual growth of his readers. His message is grounded in an understanding of the role of memory.

2 Peter 1:14 Peter states that he knows he is going to die soon. V. 15 he states he is eager for his readers to understand.

Although his traumatic event was not negative, it is still important for him to share it and for others to listen to his story. He has this sense of urgency. He wants everyone to know that Jesus is God's divine Son, who came to show humanity how much God loves them and how to live.

Just as Dr. Zahl wants people to understand that the key to peace and hope is the resolution of unhealed, unresolved pain.

Peter wants people to understand his message: the offering of hope and peace found in a relationship with God in Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

I want to encourage you dear friends, to listen to your own thoughts. See what surfaces.

I also want to encourage you to listen to Peter's message and... believe.

Book: *Peace in the Last Third of Life* by Paul F.M. Zahl