

February 14, 2021
Transfiguration Sunday
Vicar Hephzibah's sermon

Please join me in prayer: Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you my rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

We've been on quite a journey since the beginning of the church year. First, we began with the season of Advent, in which we prepared for the birth of Christ by understanding why it was so important for Christ to come to earth. Then we celebrated the glorious birth of Christ for 12 days. Then we entered into the season of Epiphany, in which the past six weeks we "celebrated the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ." throughout his ministry. In just three days, we will enter into the season of Lent, where we will spend 40 days in reflection and preparation for passion week, of the time where Jesus would be brutally beaten and crucified on the cross.

As we transition into that season of reflection, a season in which we might try to give up something we love for the next 40 days, we land on Transfiguration Sunday. We read in our gospel text of how Jesus was transfigured in front of three of his disciples. During this moment in which Jesus' appearance is changed, Peter, James, and John see Moses and Elijah with Jesus. As Peter decides to build a shrine for each of them, a thunderous voice says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him, I am well pleased; listen to him!" If you remember, it's the same voice that spoke the same words at Christ's baptism.

And rightfully so, the three disciples were so shaken by what they have seen and heard, Christ comforts them but later warns them not to mention a word about what just happened until his resurrection.

This story shifts the focus from Jesus' ministry to Jesus himself. In a way, we could say that this transfiguration moment is a miracle for Jesus. Jesus' miracles were all about healing other's emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual illnesses. However, this miracle of Jesus is above any miracle Jesus performs for others. This miracle is as great if not greater than the miracle of his resurrection.

In this moment of transcendent glory, Jesus' clothes became dazzling white, and his face shines like the sun. Do you know who else face is shone like the sun as well? I'll give you two hints, he's one of the two men that appears along with Jesus on the mountain, and he brought the law to the people? It's Moses! When Moses would speak to God on the mountain, his face would shine like the sun. It becomes difficult for Moses to speak to the Israelites because the people began to fear Moses, and so Moses began to wear a head covering when he visited God on Mount Sinai. So it makes sense Moses would appear along with Jesus during this

moment of glory because Moses firmly established the relationship between God and his people through the law. However, what was interesting about this moment is the appearance of Elijah. You often hear throughout the New Testament, especially in moments when Jesus asks his disciples who people say that he is. Some of them would respond, “Some say you are Elijah.”

There is a significant reason why Elijah is as important as Moses. First, Elijah is essentially the first non-priestly prophet of the Old Testament and brought the people back to God, using his prophetic voice. Second, Elijah is so holy that he doesn't die but is taken up by God. Third, Elijah's appearance on the mountain that day is to fulfill the prophecy declared in Malachi, which says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” Therefore, Elijah's reappearance means two things: he comes to bring about reconciliation and the presence of the Messiah. So, Moses and Elijah's appearance on that mount during the transfiguration of Christ is a bold campaign that Jesus Christ is truly the Messiah that Israel has been waiting for. And if that wasn't clear enough for the disciples or us, the scene is followed by God's thunderous voice proclaiming Jesus as God's son and instructing the disciples to listen to him. It's such a powerful moment and what makes it beautiful is the people who get to witness that moment are ordinary people, Jesus' disciples, who came from humble beginnings. These fishermen became fishers of men.

So, what does this tell us, this spectacular display of Christ's glory as of the incarnate son of God? It means several things: First, it reminds us of who Christ is. Christ has come to fulfill both the law (represented by Moses) and the prophecy (represented by Elijah). We have heard time and again through the Old Testament and the New Testament, and here this moment, with the presence of Elijah and Moses, there is no way we can deny the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. Second, the Transfiguration of Jesus was to help Peter, James, and John not only to see the glory and true nature of Jesus but to draw courage and strength from this moment to face the upcoming death of Jesus and the persecution for being his follower.

Third, this moment is a reminder to us not to be like Peter to create short-term glory for ourselves and others. Because Peter's real intention of building altars for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses wasn't out of plain respect but to get the recognition from Jesus that Peter thought of this idea first, Peter's action might remind us that we should glorify Christ in the ways he taught the disciples and us through his word: By placing our faith in God, by proclaiming that Jesus is the true Messiah, by living out our identity as Christians despite the challenges or judgments we face, by being faithful to our neighbors as we would with our loved ones, by continually putting God's will and the needs of others before ours. These are ways we can genuinely glorify Christ.

I try my best to spend at least one hour in God's presence every day. I can't fully explain how powerful those moments are when I just cry with so much gratitude for what God has done for me. At that moment, I witness God's glory, which isn't on a mountain top but in the four walls of my bedroom, not in the physical presence of Jesus, Elijah, and Moses shining like the sun, but in the presence of a simple cross. That one hour at the start of my day, praising God, reading the scriptures, and praying for guidance in this path and the well-fare of my family, neighbors, this country, this world, and current problems help me tackle challenges that come before. However, it also reminds me of the ways I can bring glory to God.

In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.