

Transfiguration Sunday  
2 Kings 2:1-12; Mark 9:2-9  
Preacher: Vicar, Jim Goodyear

St. Peter's Lafayette Hill, PA  
February 22, 2009

### **“A Mountaintop Experience”**

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, whatever that means! Transfiguration is not a word I use everyday. In fact, the only time I use the word is in the church, of all places, and just before Lent. It is in the church context this word has meaning. Merriam-Webster defines transfiguration “as a change in form or appearance, an exulting, glorifying spiritual change”. Isn't that what we do as Christians, transfigure lives? Isn't that what we heard in our scripture lessons today? In the Old Testament we have Elisha following Elijah to the different places the Lord has called him, from Bethel to the river Jordan. At each place the prophets tell Elisha don't you know the Lord is going to take your master Elijah away today? Elisha responds each time with, “yes, be quiet”; don't remind me. Elijah knows his death is imminent and Elisha doesn't want him to leave. When the Lord finally calls Elijah home, Elisha is so distraught he tears his clothing. Remember last week, Pr. Todd told us that tearing of clothes is a sign of mourning. Elisha experienced a transfiguration as Elijah moved from his earthly presence in a whirlwind by a chariot of fire and horses to be with God.

The Markan text today tells us how Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain. Also appearing with them were Elijah and Moses who began talking with Jesus. Suddenly there was a cloud that overshadowed them in a voice saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” The only one left standing among the disciples was Jesus. Jesus had been transfigured before their eyes. Peter, James and John experienced a spiritual change. And Jesus was revealed to his disciples by God as his son. Jesus was now fully human and fully divine. Peter, James and John were there, but not really sure of what was happening right before their eyes; their teacher, rabbi, who was living with them, they now understood to be one with God.

Looking at the church year, we are about to experience a transfiguration. We experienced the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day; coming to us in human form in the darkness of the night. In this Epiphany season we see how the light of Jesus brightens our way in the world by living in Jesus, the one who comes to each of us in great and mysterious ways. We discover the epiphanies in our own lives when we welcome Jesus into our lives. This coming Wednesday we begin the season of Lent; a time when the church reflects on itself, to seek forgiveness for sins; to repent of our sinful ways promising to God to make changes; to commit to following Jesus, once human now divine too. Jesus takes his three closest followers to the mountaintop and there God calls out, “This is my Son; the beloved. Listen to him!” From the brightness of Epiphany to the solemnness of Lent; we are experience a spiritual change, a transfiguration.

Twenty-five years ago, Hasbro, the giant toy maker took us to a world where things are not the same... Transformers brand history began with the first ever robot-to-vehicle figures. In

their first year, Hasbro introduced AUTOBOT vehicles, DECEPTICON figures, and an animated TV series that quickly grew to a five-day schedule. Marvel Comics introduced these new transformers in a comic book. The world of toys was transformed with figures never thought of before. In 1992, a second generation of Transformers was introduced, or so we thought. What really happened was a re-release of the original figures with a new paint job along with some new characters. Computer enhancements were added to the TV show. Just two years ago, the “classics” line of action figures were released. Using modern technology the original transformers were designed as if they were designed today for the first time. Transformers had taken the world by storm with converting action figures leading the charge. Soon transformers were seen on every conceivable product including bedding, footwear, apparel, sporting goods, back-to-school items. A global life-style brand emerged.

Like the transformers in the toy box or on the toy collectors shelf, Jesus was transfigured on that mountaintop with his three closest friends. Right before their eyes God calls out, “This is my Son; the beloved. Listen to him!” Once a human being walking the countryside with Peter, James and John; God now reveals that Jesus is his son! Hours before they climbed together to this mountain top. I imagine the conversation was typical. Between the huffing and puffing of climbing, each probably shared stories of the previous day and night with each other. Talking about the view they would see from the top – the spectacular countryside, the town below, the beauty of nature at their feet. Not thinking of what the future might bring. Isn’t that the magnificence of being on the mountain top? To glow in the accomplishment of reaching the top surrounded by God’s presence. Just think what they might have thought when they reached the top and encountered Moses and Elijah there too! Without warning Jesus begins to glow with a radiance never seen before. A reunion of God’s closest followers; God’s action figures taking center stage.

No wonder Peter speaking on behalf of James and John too was terrified and frightened by the brilliant glow of Jesus. They probably didn’t have their sun glasses, raising their arms to hide from the bright light. He suggested building three tents for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Here on this mountain top were the three closest persons to God. We need to get out of here, we are not worthy to be in the presence of God. Hide them in the tents so we can go on our merry way. Put them out of sight. They were terrified at what they saw. Jesus their friend had been transfigured into something they didn’t understand. Once human, now the divinity of Jesus was revealed. Like the action toy that was once a human robot was now transformed into a vehicle for God’s use among us. A new brand of Jesus was about to shape the world.

But wait, what is the meaning of Jesus’ comment ‘not to tell anyone about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.’ What is this talk about rising from the dead? Once you are dead you are dead! Nothing can bring us back to life. What kind of transformation is taking place? Here is Jesus going up the mountain as a human, coming down as a divine being of God AND still human. Now I have heard of a mountain top experience that changes a persons view of the world. But to change from a human being into a divine being at the same time, that is one awesome experience.

Jesus knew what was coming; that he would die on a cross to save all humanity. Jesus became the vehicle changed from a human being for you and I to be in relationship with God. I would be like Peter too, scared of what Jesus said about his impending death. On top of that mountain top, first experiencing time with Moses, Elijah and Jesus was awesome. Now Jesus, Peter, James, and John needed to descend into the real world. The view from the top was blinding. The hike down is troublesome. Troublesome not only because of the terrain, but also because of the words that are still in their heads “tell no one of the experience until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”

Our daily lives are filled with mountains and valleys. When life is going well, we say we are on top of the world. There is nothing that can take us away from the good feelings of being with others. Life is good! But when life is troublesome, we come down off the high peak and enter the valley. The Psalmist writes, “Though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me.” In our faith journey as Christians, we come down from the mountain top after witnessing the Great Epiphany today. Our journey continues this week as we enter the valley we call Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday; a solemn reminder that we are but dust, and to dust we shall return. What will your Lenten journey be like after discovering the brilliance of a shining Jesus? How will you nurture your spiritual health during this time of personal transfiguration? Take time to reflect on what it means for you to be living in Jesus. Because we are on this side of the resurrection, we know that Jesus WILL rise from the dead, that we will have eternal life, that God loves all of us through his Son. The next mountain top experience for us, will be when we look into the empty tomb to find that He is risen from the dead! He is risen indeed! What a glorious experience that will be!