

## **Sermon – Sunday, August 6, 2023**

**Rev. Randi**

If you've been coming around regularly, you'll realize we have recently read about the Transfiguration. We read it on the last Sunday of Epiphanytide this year, as we do every year, because it prepares us to enter the 40 days of Lent that lead up to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. This year, just before Lent, we read the Transfiguration story from the Gospel of Matthew.

We are celebrating the Feast of the Transfiguration at this time of year because today – August 6 – is the Feast of the Transfiguration on the church calendar. August 6 falls on a Sunday only once every six or seven years. It last occurred in 2017. The early church chose August 6 as the date of the Feast of the Transfiguration because the first church on Mount Tabor was dedicated on that day. Mount Tabor is a high mountain; the earliest traditions say it was the site of the Transfiguration. On those occasions when August 6 is a Sunday, our Episcopal tradition always celebrates the Feast of the Transfiguration instead of using the readings appointed for that week.

We use the account of the Transfiguration from Luke instead of Matthew, which we used earlier this year. Luke's account differs from accounts of the Transfiguration in other Gospels because it explicitly mentions Jesus's death (or departure). Jesus's death is a supreme exodus. The original exodus for the Israelites occurred when Moses, as God's representative, led the people across the Sea and out of slavery. Later, the people experienced a new life of freedom in the Promised Land. Jesus makes a journey on behalf of all of us that frees us from the penalty of sin and the finality of death and leads us into resurrection. Luke's Gospel makes this abundantly clear. Even though we still sin, we are free from the finality of death. We will experience our Transfiguration in resurrection and eternal life.

However, we also can experience Transfiguration in the world.

Luke's Gospel makes clear the difference between Jesus's bright light and the world's chaos and darkness. If we read beyond the verses in the lectionary, we see that Jesus and the core group of disciples come down the mountain to a chaotic scene. A crowd has gathered, and a man is unhappy that the remaining disciples could not cast out an evil spirit from his son. Jesus then refers to a "wicked and perverse generation." We go from the glorious light of Christ to the darkness and unfaithfulness of the world quickly.

The message is clear. As long as we continue to focus on the light of Christ -- on Jesus in His glory -- we experience Jesus's power to transform the world. We can make a difference in the world as long as we look to God's light. But, once we take our eyes and hearts from that light, we lose our connection with this power.

It's easy to keep our eyes focused on Jesus when we are here in the church worshipping on Sunday. But to really experience transformation – indeed Transfiguration – we must also keep our eyes focused on Jesus as we go out of the church into the surrounding community.

I want to share an example from a church in the Bronx. For many years, the church locked its doors against the neighborhood. Folks came on Sunday to worship but didn't mix much with the community around the church because they were reluctant to engage with its poverty.

One day, the church unlocked its doors and began spending time in the community. It made the community its mission field by doing everything it could to help those in poverty or heal the distressed. It made helping the community its primary way of worshiping God. The church focused on that light of Christ – on doing what Jesus would do – even as it came down from its holy sanctuary into the world. That congregation discovered Transfiguration as it connected with the less fortunate of the community. Not only did the church transform the lives of others by shining Christ's light in the world. The church also transformed itself. It experienced Transfiguration as a congregation as it connected with others. It became a shining light inside and out.

Some days we may not feel as enveloped in God's light as others. We all have days when we struggle and feel the darkness and difficulties of the world around us. The good news is that we only need to feel a tiny pinpoint of light. As the epistle tells us, we only need to be attentive to one lamp shining in a dark place. Because even just one pinpoint of light can transform. On difficult days, we must remember that God is with us. We need to remember that God is faithful to us. And we remember that Jesus has made it possible for us to be victorious over evil by making that exodus journey for us. If we can focus on one pinpoint of light, we'll see that the light overpowers the darkness. We'll see that God is still in control of the world. And once we see that the Morningstar will rise in our hearts. We can go out into the world and fill it with the light of Christ.