

2-14-2010, Transfiguration C, Valentine's Day  
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

The Testimony of God  
Luke 9:28-36

This Biblical text tells us once again the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. "Transfiguration" is a kind of an odd word, isn't it? I remember preaching about the Transfiguration at a Sunday evening service, when, out of the blue, a man stood up and said, "You keep saying 'transfiguration.' What does that mean?"

The truth is that apart from this story, we almost never use the word "transfiguration." And even when we talk about this story, often people will say that Jesus was transformed before the disciples. But that's a mistake. Jesus wasn't transformed on the mountaintop. He was transfigured.

What's the difference, you say? I'm glad you asked that. Since this is Valentine's Day, let me use a romantic illustration. When a girl changes from a girl into a young woman, that transformation. When a boy looks at that young woman and says to himself, "When did she get to be so beautiful," that's transfiguration. Transformation is when someone is changed. Transfiguration is when someone looks different to someone else. Transfiguration is in the eye of the beholder.

The point is that Jesus was not transformed on the mountaintop. He did not become the glorious Son of God that night. He already was the glorious Son of God. He already shone with the glory of God. What happened on the mountaintop was that the disciples eyes were opened, and they saw his glory for the first time. He was transfigured in their eyes.

Now, here's the question for us. Has Christ been transfigured in our eyes? Have we seen the glory of God in Christ?

Most of us grew up knowing about Christ. If you were raised in the church and in a Christian home, you grew up hearing the stories about Jesus. You memorized his words. You were taught to live the way Jesus told us to live. You probably had a great admiration and respect for Christ.

But have you seen the glory of Christ? Have you ever been overwhelmed with the glory and majesty of his presence? Christ is with us. His glorious presence has surrounded us all the days of our lives. But until he is transfigured before our eyes, we just don't see it.

Why is that important? Is it so that we can enjoy a spiritual high—a thrill? No. Because you don't stay on a spiritual high. I know people who have a mountaintop experience, and they are like Peter. They want to pitch a tent and stay high on the glory of Christ. They are constantly trying to repeat that experience. They go from one retreat to another, one seminar to another. They go from church to church, looking for that church that can give them a spiritual high.

Well, Peter could have stayed on that mountaintop if he wanted to. But he wouldn't have enjoyed it nearly as much as he wanted to, because he would have been all alone. Paraphrasing the announcer from the days of Elvis, "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, JESUS HAS LEFT THE MOUNTAINTOP."

Christ went down from the mountaintop to cast out demons and continue his journey to the Cross. Peter, James and John didn't even have a chance to tell anyone what they saw there on the mountain. They were so quickly caught up in Jesus' struggle to care for people that they

nearly forgot the glory of that night. It wasn't until after Christ was crucified and resurrected that they remembered and told the others.

However, in the years following the Resurrection, seeing the glory of Christ that night and seeing the glory of the Resurrected Christ gave them the strength and the courage to fight the good fight against the powers of death and destruction for the rest of their days.

That's the reason we need to see Christ transfigured. We need to see his glory, because the memory of that vision gives us strength to keep going through days which are anything but glorious.

Again, returning to the Valentine's Day theme. Walking with Christ is very much like marriage. Becky and I have completed 39 years of marriage. We are working on our 40<sup>th</sup> year. I would love to be able to say that it's been 39 years of glorious fun and wedded bliss. There has been some of that along the way. But mostly it's been hard work.

40 years ago, we fell deeply and wonderfully in love with each other. The love we were given back then has been a reservoir to which we have returned again and again. When we get so tired of fighting the battles of life that we can hardly take another step, we remember how deeply in love we were. The memory of the awesome love that brought us together gives us the strength to keep moving forward.

And that's the way it is with Christ. At some point we saw the glory of Christ and fell completely in love with him. When we are tempted to grow weary in our walk with Christ, we remember the mountaintop, and we are given the strength to keep going.

We know about marathons, those long, long distance endurance races. The object for a few is to beat everyone else to the finish line. But that's not the goal for most of the marathon runners. I have never personally known a marathon runner whose goal was to win the race. The goal of every marathon runner I have ever known was simply to finish the race. The Christian life is a marathon. Our goal is not to be the best Christian. Our goal is to live each day faithful to Christ all the days of our lives.

Many falter and fall away in this endurance. We are going over our membership rolls. Over and over again we come across names of people who were once active members of this church. But then something happened. They faded away. In some cases, certainly not all cases, but in some cases, they just got tired of serving Jesus. They burned out on Christ. It happens. It could happen to any of us. We need all the help we can get to keep going.

That's why the Transfiguration of Christ is important. On those many days when there is no glory in serving Christ (and there are far more of those days than the other kind), we keep going by remembering the glory of Christ that was revealed to us on a mountaintop long ago and far away. Christ takes us to the mountaintop to prepare us to follow him into the valley.

And that's why it's important for us to see the transfigured Christ. At some point, we need to see the great teacher transfigured into the glorious Son of God. Following Christ is a hard, demanding life. Why do we do it? Because we have seen his glory.

His is the glory of complete love, pure holiness, total righteousness. He radiates unbounded energy and power. There is joy and laughter in his countenance. Yet, he glows with the awesomeness of eternity. He is more alive than life itself. He is more real than reality. There is no limit to what he is willing to suffer for us. There is no evil he cannot overcome.

When you have seen the glory of Christ, you can't settle for anything less. No one else, nothing else, can claim your heart, because there is just nothing else and no one else that can compare to Christ.

So, how can we be witnesses to the transfiguration of Christ? God has to show us. No one can see the transfigured Christ unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to his glory. Charles Wesley said it beautifully in the hymn “Spirit of Faith, Come Down.”

“Spirit of faith, come down, reveal the things of God, and make to us the Godhead known, and witness with the blood. ‘Tis thine the blood to apply and give us eyes to see, who did for every sinner die hath surely died for me.

“No one can truly say that Jesus is the Lord, unless thou take the veil away and breathe the living Word. Then, only then, we feel our interest in his blood, and cry with joy unspeakable, ‘Thou art my Lord, my God!’”

The glory of Christ is hidden from us until God chooses to reveal it to us. And God reveals it to us when we are ready to begin that long, hard journey with Christ.

If you haven’t yet seen the glory of Christ, pray that God will open your eyes. It really is glorious.

If you have been a witness to the Transfiguration of Christ, don’t forget what you have seen. Remember the mountaintop, and let that vision be your strength.

Dr. Wesley Welborn  
Senior Pastor