

**February 14, 2021**

2 Corinthians 4: 3-6

Mark 9: 2-9

*Transfigured Disciples*  
**The Reverend Andrew Frazier**

I love snow. More accurately, I love the way snow transfigures the dull, dead landscape of winter into something magical. I love the way snow covers and obscures the familiar and mundane. I love how quiet it gets when it snows, as if the volume of the world were turned all the way down. But I also love how the snow turns up the contrast and highlights every branch, every twig of a tree. The static blur of a bare forest is suddenly thrown into sharp relief with a dusting of snow. I feel as if it allows me to see further and make out more details of the world around me. And I especially love those days when the sun burns off the dreary gray winter film and the light is blinding when you first step outside.

I imagine that bright, brilliant, eye-watering sunlight is something like what Peter and the disciples experienced up on that mountain with Jesus. Mark's account of the transfiguration wastes no time getting to the action. Jesus, Peter, James, and John go up a high mountain together and BOOM! Suddenly Jesus is transfigured before them. I like to imagine that Jesus had a sense of humor and didn't tell them what to expect, that maybe he wore a small smile as they hiked up the mountain, imagining their stunned reactions when he began shining brighter than the sun. I wonder if they had any idea that they were about to see Moses and Elijah, or that God would speak to them directly. Mountains were viewed as holy places during that time, places where the veil between this world and the realm of the divine was thin and permeable. This mountain was indeed a holy place, a liminal space between Jesus's life and death, the transfiguration a foretaste of what's to come, a mere glimpse of the future glory of Jesus's resurrection.

A liminal space is like a threshold, a space in between two places, limbo. Our worship over the past year has been liminal, both here and not here, stuck between separation and reunion. This day is a liminal space between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent. We may be here, now, on the mountaintop with Jesus, witnessing the glory of his profound transfiguration, but three days from now, as we mark ourselves with ashes and enter into the 40 days of Lent, we will be reminded of the undeniable truth that we are nothing more than dust, and we'll begin the inevitable journey toward the cross.

So here, standing on this threshold between Epiphany and Lent, what does the transfiguration mean? What is its invitation to us? To be honest, I'm not sure. I feel so much like Peter as I dwell in this story. It's wondrous and awe-inspiring and absolutely terrifying, and if I were in his sandals, I'd probably make the same suggestion. Peter's desire to hold onto this experience is raw and real. He loves Jesus deeply. At the end of the previous chapter in Mark, Peter rebukes Jesus when he foretells his death and resurrection. He doesn't want to lose his friend, his teacher, his Messiah and his God. Peter recognizes that God is with him, and he doesn't want to let go. He wants to build a dwelling place for God so that God will always be with him. Think about your own experiences of being in God's presence, those moments when you knew undeniably that God was with you.

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Those moments of recognition, of realizing the divine is moving among us, are so fleeting. Who wouldn't want to hold onto those moments, to scrutinize them and attempt to understand them, to turn them over and over in our hands and soak up every last bit of meaning?

I'm reminded of the Hobbit Sméagol from *The Lord of the Rings*. By chance he came across the One Ring, an undeniably wondrous and awe-inspiring and absolutely terrifying object. Yet he became consumed with and by its corrupting power, isolating himself to keep it safe, his Precious, his most beloved possession, until he was transformed by the ring's power and his own selfish desire to own it, into the monstrous and pitiable creature, Gollum. Obviously, Jesus Christ isn't a corrupting power like the One Ring, but if we attempt to lay claim to him and keep him hidden away inside a tabernacle or sanctuary for ourselves, instead of sharing him with the world, we will corrupt ourselves, and become the very power that Christ came to overcome. Jesus and the disciples couldn't stay on the mountaintop, hanging in limbo, dwelling in that threshold forever. There was more for Jesus to do, more for Peter and the disciples to learn. Jesus took them with him to the mountain in all their imperfection and confusion and doubt, and even after God spoke directly to them, they still didn't fully understand. But Jesus took them with him anyway. He took them into Jerusalem, to the Last Supper, and even to Gethsemane. He called them to the cross, and he called them to the tomb. Others were more faithful, namely the women, and yet he still called to them despite their confusion, despite their unbelief.

I think that's why the story of the boy with a spirit immediately follows the transfiguration. Peter and the disciples didn't understand what had happened, but they believed and had faith in Jesus, in who he was, and there was work to do. There were people who needed their help. Their doubt, their confusion, their unbelief didn't prevent them from accompanying Jesus along the way, and the father's unbelief didn't prevent his son from being healed.

As I understand the text, the transfiguration calls us to discipleship. Discipleship isn't a single event or achievement or a box to check, but a process, a transformation that happens gradually along the journey of faith. Mountaintop experiences are amazing, and they can transfigure us so that we, too, radiate God's light and love, but they're fleeting experiences, and the light will eventually fade. If we try to hold on to them, to recreate the exact circumstances, to keep them to ourselves, our faith and our lives will stagnate and decay. But if we take those encounters with Jesus out into the world and freely share that holy light with those in need, there's no telling what wondrous things we'll see and do together, what new mountaintop experiences we'll have.

These youth, these confirmands, these young disciples who have so beautifully led us in worshipping God today, may have had their own mountaintop experiences, so let's ask them to tell us about their experiences, and let's listen actively and eagerly for the wisdom God has given them. But maybe they haven't had a mountaintop experience yet. Maybe you haven't, either. Maybe they're not yet sure God is really with them, so let's follow them up the mountains they choose to climb and lift the veil from our eyes so that we might see what they have to teach us. They've chosen to cultivate their understanding of faith, to be transformed by their encounters with God, and they've walked down the mountain to follow Jesus out into the world. Walking the path of discipleship takes time and commitment and encouragement from all of us, but it doesn't require understanding. All it requires is faith. Understanding comes to all of us in bits and pieces, in glimpses of the glory to come, but let us never think we hold all the pieces, all the answers, all the understanding.

For as the Rev. Dr. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks writes, "What is known in the present is often revealed in greater detail in the future. This is the reality of the transfiguration. The glow that marked the change in Jesus was the light that would change humanity for all time. It offers a glorious future to all who trust in the glory that is yet to be revealed" (324, *Connections*, Rev. Dr. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks, professor of preaching at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary).



It's snowed multiple times this week, but I'll never forget what happened Monday evening. We got a light dusting of snow that night. It was bitterly cold and dry, so cold and so dry that the individual ice crystals of the snowflakes perfectly reflected every bit of light that touched their fragile forms. And for a while, the dirty snow that lined the streets and sidewalks that covered the grass and adorned the trees, was transfigured into glittering starlight. I'm so grateful I was there to witness that fleeting transfiguration. I'm so grateful to follow the Messiah, the Son of God, who went up a mountain with his friends and gave us a glimpse of the glorious future that is yet to be revealed. I'm so grateful to follow Emmanuel, who came down the mountain and turned his sight toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, toward the tomb. And I'm grateful to follow Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, who took ordinary bread and wine and water, and transformed it for our salvation.

Let us pray. Lord, we believe; help our unbelief. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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