

Feast of the Transfiguration – 2011 - Luke 9:28-36 – Exodus 34:29-35

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ (transferred from August 6) that commemorates a profound moment in the in progression of the disciples knowledge of Jesus. It marks a dramatic experience of radical conversion in the lives of those first followers.

Preachers often make much to do about Peter and James and John wanting to stay right there in the glow of that mountain top experience – contending that they were hopeless romantics who forgot that they must climb down and re-enter common life below.

I will not do that today. I think that the disciples were on to something, something that has stunning possibility and grace for our lives.

When Jesus first broke into their ordinary and unremarkable lives – taken up with collecting taxes and fishing – they experienced him first as a stranger breaking into their lives with a compelling urgency, inviting allegiance, offering intimacy, summoning commitment.

He crashed into their worlds as enigmatic, commanding, and powerfully significant. There was so much they did not know about him, but his presence was potent with an irresistible magnetism.

Each day brought new perceptions of Jesus for the disciples, and as he talked and taught and helped and healed, they slowly learned that their friend was more than an ordinary rabbi from Nazareth.

As time went on it became more and more clear that Jesus was more than a friend and wonder worker.

He talked about the suffering and death looming ahead for him, and that it was for the healing of the world, and their astonishment grew. The door began to crack open and they glimpsed the bright streaming light that was spreading around him.

Soon after, Peter makes his astounding confession that this man, about whom not only the disciples, but Herod is wondering, this man Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Messiah of God who has come to set God's people free!

With this astonishing confession still reverberating through them, Jesus takes Peter, James and John with him when he goes up the

mountain to pray. There, while Jesus is praying, he is transfigured in the disciples' sight, the appearance of his face is changed, Moses and Elijah appear with him in his glory, talking to him, breaking ordinary chronology into a million fragments, and his clothes become dazzling white.

A voice from the cloud that envelopes them all declares: *"This is my son, my Chosen; listen to him."*

Heady stuff! Mythic stuff!

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell the story in this way. So much like the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples, and we should remember that the gospels were written well after the resurrection. A great story that moves beyond fact into the mythic.

What it clearly reflects is a transition in the disciples perception of the human Jesus, to their faith in Jesus as the Christ. The man they knew as a friend, a teacher, and a healer, now in their experience becomes the Messiah, the Chosen of God, whom they see in dazzling glory, a confirmation of his identity!

It was a mountaintop experience bringing them close to God's glory, like Moses on Mt. Sinai, filled with the rapture of touching divinity.

They returned to the other followers and shared the glory-story, and like some contagion it spread, generation to generation, and so to us. In the telling we have found wonder and rapture. But more often we have heard it with jaded ears, impatient with the fantastical and doubting its authenticity.

Peter and James and John were rather like the little child you pick up and swing high up into the air. With joyful laughter she says, “Again! And you swing her again; and over and over she says “Again!” and you swing her again, and again, over and over! The simple act of swinging high into the air on the arms of a loving aunt or uncle does not lose its power to charm and captivate, not once being a boring repetition of a silly act. The single action of child and aunt or uncle becomes one mystery of immediate, glorious fulfillment and engagement.

But, alas the little girl will grow up and experience many more fantastical events with dramatic effects of sight and sound, charming her, leaving her jaded and bored with that silly act of swinging.

Incomplete as this comparison is, it points to the dreadful loss of enchantment that has come to characterize so much of our culture.

We so often emphasize control and bare rationality so that anything that mystifies us has our attention only as long as we are engaged in solving the mystery. Maybe so that it can no longer have any unsettling power over us.

We are not so much moved by the power of what is enchantingly beautiful as by our desire to own it, change it, control it, and finally to know it.

Like the little girl many of us have lost our innocence, our wonder-filled naïveté, and find it hard to approach what is new with an open curiosity ready to be thrilled and enthralled.

Have we not in some measure, all of us, lost our innocence, our ability to delight in the wonders that come to us through those things that are beyond our grasp?

Our culture encourages efforts to limit, reduce and confine the broad horizon of mystery and place reality firmly under our control.

And we become nervous when experience does not yield to rational understanding.

When last have you been dazzled, dazzled right out of your mind,
so much that you have let the bedazzlement linger and last, to
make friends with it, allowing it to shape your ways and your days?

It might have been the clear true blue of our Colorado sky, the
open, radiant smile of your love, the cool blue freshness of the
mountain stream lapping around your feet.

It could have been puzzling out a complicated relationship, riddled
with issues but essentially loving, or noticing the wonder of virile,
strong and beautiful youth, or age with its reluctant serenity and
inevitable losses - or a person or project or place.

But we ended up un-dazzled!

Too sophisticated, busy, knowledgeable, too bright or bored, or
depressed or lonely.

Whatever it was, you drew the line. I am not a child you said. You
refused to be dazzled. You said no to wonder. You disallowed
enchantment.

Does that fit any of us?

To lose wonder and reject enchantment is a costly temptation in
our way of life today. Characterized by the fracture of confidence in
what charms and apprehends us, we can squander our ability to

lose ourselves in wonder, love and praise. We can be reduced to a white-knuckled grip on what we think is really real, leaving us bloodless in a reality empty of the power to engage our minds, bodies and spirits – or to direct our days. Innocence leaves us.

Towards the end of the movie of Oscar Wilde's play *An Ideal Husband*, when relationships are confused and compromised by the ambiguity that comes with living and loving, one of the characters says, "There is a great deal of difference between looking and seeing. To look at a thing," he says, "is not quite the same as seeing it." Then he goes on to say even more tellingly, "You can only see a thing when you can see its beauty."

Beauty is beheld when the inner eye of our hearts is opened. The beauty and glory of Jesus Christ is transfigured into our lives when we open the lens of our lives to see Christ.

When Peter and James and John when deeply saw Jesus for the first time on the mountaintop, and they were dazzled.

We think and debate and study about Jesus. We parse the paradoxes of his preaching. We wonder about the incongruities of historical Jesus with the Christ of faith.

But do we see Jesus Christ? And are we dazzled?

Have you stopped often enough and long enough to be charmed by the truth of God drawing so near as to be with you here and now?

Still enough to be see the glory, as Moses did on Mt Sinai?
Listened deep and hard and long enough to know that God speaks to you in Jesus Christ even though you don't hear any specific words?

Have you peeled away the callused skin of skepticism to sense Christ reaching out to you with a lover's embrace, a friend's gentle touch? To be enchanted with the caress of God's love?

It is that love which calls us to move beyond the limited world of fact and into the glorious world of love itself!

Life in Christ is about many things, and surely about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and including the outcast and serving truth and justice, about mending the world.

But following Jesus Christ is first and foremost about looking at Christ and seeing him. And having seen Jesus, being dazzled by the wonder, beauty, truth, goodness and peace of God, which he is.

What we are being asked to trust by faith, on this feast of Transfiguration, is that at certain breakthrough moments in time, the glory of God is certifiably visible.

In that first moment when Christ's love dawned on us like a morning star, and then again and again when we have been permeable to the presence and touch of Christ. Dazzled by him, enchanted again and again by how in Christ God dignifies and re-aligns our lives.

The face of Moses shown as a result of his encounter with the Holy, and Peter, James and John were enveloped by the glory of seeing Jesus as the Chosen One.

The disciples inner eyes watered from the glare, for when the bright envelope of God's presence draws near and our eyes are opened to see it for ourselves, a radiance burns itself into the back of our eyes, deep into our imagination.

We are asked by these lessons to trust that, and sometimes I think that setting out to see that glory is the only thing worth doing in
life!

And to trust in the glory of God even when we cannot see it, when the room is dark and we cannot find the light, even then these mythic stories can be strong in us, strong enough to change our
lives.

We live in a world where glory is possible, where light may break through any moment. We could even say that the world is made out of light that is straining against the skin of the world at every
moment.

In looking for and finding Christ and allowing ourselves to be dazzled by Christ, we open ourselves to all those other
bedazzlements that lie all around us.

You never know when a face will begin to shine, including your own face. No lover's sigh or baby's smile, no bold risk dared or costly sacrifice made, no glimpse of possible beauty or tingle of
potential pleasure need leave us un-enchanted.

The transfiguration is less a story only to be heard and retold than it is an experience of new life breaking in with wonder. May such transfiguration be yours and mine. And by God's grace, let us be
dazzled!