

TRANSFIGURATION

Luke 9:28-36

Let A Little Light Shine Through

The story of Jesus' transfiguration upon the mountaintop
is a story about his transformation – and ours.

There are two stories about transformation that everybody knows.

The first is the story of "**Cinderella.**"

We all know that she is really a beautiful person – inside and out.

Her life, however, is one of misery and drudgery,

no thanks to a wicked stepmother

and to two shrewish and homely stepsisters.

Now, only you, and the fairy godmother can really see

that she is truly a princess,

until everyone sees her through the eyes of the handsome prince.

Then, her true beauty and identity shine though.

It is a wonderful story, though it has caused more than one of us

to wish for a fairy godmother, if not a handsome prince.

The second story is "**Beauty and the Beast.**"

Here, as with Cinderella, everybody knows the story.

The handsome prince was turned into a hideous beast
because he could not – would not love.

Before he could ever be human again,
he needed to find and accept
the unconditional love of another person.

And the heroine is a simple peasant girl,
who radiates purity and a wise, but self-giving love.

Love has a transforming power!

It shines through the dark depths of the human soul
and causes the world to change – always for the better.

The Disney people have made a fortune out of these stories,
for they know that these stories strike a deep chord within us.

I am certain, however, that many a girl has married a prince,
only to find that she married a beast.

Likewise, many a man thought he married Cinderella,
but found that it was one of the ugly stepsisters, instead.

The promise of transformation doesn't happen like we hope it will.

People have tried evolution, revolution, conflict resolution,
but the promise continues to elude us.

What if the promise of transformation is not just a myth?

What if it is still God's intent

to transform the world to a better place?

The Gospel of Luke offers us a story ***of that kind of transformation!***

There are no princes, princesses, evil stepsisters, or beasts,

just Jesus and his disciples.

But Jesus is not a Disney character

drawn upon celluloid for the movies.

Jesus is here and he is the **master of real spiritual transformation!**

Now about eight days later... this is how our story begins.

Eight days after what? Only eight days before,

Jesus revealed himself to the disciples.

Simon Peter, the Bill Murray of the group,

is the only one to really get it.

Just when he gets the right idea,

he pushes it in the wrong direction.

Jesus affirms that indeed, he is the Messiah,

and that his fate is **to go to Jerusalem and die!**

To that, Peter stamps his foot and says, ***"no way!"***

It was not that Jesus did not struggle with this thing about the cross;
he obviously did. If he could have it any other way,
he would have done as much.

But the cross was ***THE way*** to accomplish God's highest purpose
in Jesus' life and for the life of the world!

As Peter saw it, the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
could come ***without the need of a cross.***

He and Jesus shared some very stormy words over it.

Then came the mountain top experience.

Jesus went up to the mountain to seek God.

He was struggling so with God's will **and the cross** in his future.

Don't be amazed that Jesus struggled.

We have made him seem so super-human,
but he was as human as we.

Like us, Jesus had to depend upon God
to guide him and lead him in the right way.

And like us, he knew that it is all too easy
to choose the selfish way.

Up there, he got alone with God

and struggled with flesh and spirit, just as we do.

But there on the mountain, in God's presence,

Jesus did something we don't often do: he surrendered to God.

Once he did, he was filled with such peace

and the glory of God came upon him.

This is where the disciples awoke to see Jesus shining,

suffused with light, reflecting the glory of God.

Again, we meet, the Bill Murray of the disciples,

who does not have a clue about what is going on.

He was napping.

Peter was one of those people who shouts,

"Just don't stand there, do something!"

He blurts out something about building a place for Moses,

Jesus and Elijah. But the voice of God comes out of the clouds,

"This is my Son, my chosen. Listen to him!"

To those who shout, ***"Don't just stand there, do something!"***

God says, ***"Don't just do something, stand there!"***

This is exactly what Peter needs to hear.

Of course, he is not listening.

We have a hard time listening to God.

In this way, we are a lot like Peter.

Peter wanted the glory of the Kingdom,

but without paying the price.

Up on the mountain, while Jesus was struggling

to accept that the cross was God's will,

Peter's inner struggle was to avoid the cross at all costs.

If this is where you are struggling,

I want you to know **that there are no easy answers!**

There is **no crown** without the cross.

There is **no glory** apart from suffering.

There is **no life** apart from death.

Peter was open to God, yet resistant to the way of God –

just as we resist God's presence and God's will **in our life**.

We do not like spiritual struggles;

we resist them thinking that we can get along with out them.

Besides, there are so many distractions

that take us away from knowing what we are really made of,

that we have lost a grip on what it means

to struggle inside ourselves.

No athlete can compete – much less win –

if they resist the struggle of training in body and in mind.

Until they have disciplined their body and mind

they cannot visualize what it takes to win.

The point of the story is to show us

the outcome of a real spiritual struggle.

Jesus surrendered to God's will and was suffused with light.

He accepted that there was a cross before him

and was given the power to face it.

But, Peter resisted the cross before him,

and was filled with confusion, doubt and grief.

When you accept the cross, it will not be easy,

but you will experience the peace of God

that passes human understanding.

When you resist the cross – though it may seem like the easier way –

life gets harder and harder to figure out.

Like Peter, you just may be headed for a huge disappointment.

Here is where this Gospel story meets our lives:

God wants to change you,

as you know in your heart of hearts you want to be changed.

He wants to transform you and set you free.

This is not mere words or religious sounding phrases.

It is about accepting the **cross** in your life
and receiving the power of faith in Christ's death and resurrection.

Jesus faced his worst fears –

his coming suffering, humiliation, and death.

In faith, he trusted that God would not let him down.

That was his only hope;

and, it was the hope that led to his transformation.

But Peter would not let himself even think in those terms; as a result,

he missed the whole meaning of the mountain top experience!

Peter did not want to die to his dreams and hopes

because he let his worst fears control his inner life.

How like us, he is.

Like Peter, we can have the experience and miss the meaning!

Thank God that Jesus was not done with Peter.

In time, he would face the cross in all its ugly reality.

Again he ran away. But God did not give up on him.

When Jesus rose from the dead,

Peter learned that the cross is God's way to new life.

That is when Peter saw the transforming vision!

What does this passage from Luke have to say to us today?

First, that no spiritual work is easy.

You may be struggling, as Peter was,

to accept the cross in your life. It is hard work.

The cross will mean different things to each one of us;

but it will always be God's way of transforming you

after the character and image of Christ.

Do not close yourself off to it!

God is only trying to let the light of his glory shine through you.

Second, the transforming vision God wants to give us is not about us.

It is about the larger work of God and our place in it.

It is about God breaking into our world

with the power of the kingdom.

St Matthew's Episcopal Church

has a message for Newton, Kansas..

It is this: The power of God in Jesus Christ changes lives.

Jesus takes away the darkness and lets the light shine through.

Now, visualize what that could look like:

- A place of welcome for the stranger;
a place of refuge for the broken;
a place of blessing for the seeker.
- A Children's ministry so powerful
that the children lead their parents to Christ,
and homes marked by problems and strife
become places of peace and happiness.
- Perhaps, a Youth Fellowship so exciting
that kids would rather attend it than go anywhere else;
and a youth fellowship where kids go
because Jesus is such a powerful influence in their lives

because we live as his disciples.

- Or, a network of adult groups
where positive friendships abound;
where people are set free from drugs, alcohol
and a host of addictions;
where people no longer live broken lives,
but in wholeness and purpose.
- A place where we live the Christian life in integrity,
practicing justice and learning to love as Jesus loved.

The Christian life is not a spectator sport.

It is interactive with the risen Jesus.

It is not that the Christian life has been tried
and found impossible.

Rather, the Christian life has been found hard and never tried.

For a long time, we have left the Christian vision of life
for somebody else to do.

But it is not up to someone else; it is up to us.

And my hope is that someone here is listening.

Someone here is struggling.

Someone here is seeking the kind of transformation

Jesus invites us to experience.

Because, in a while, we are going to leave this building –

just as those disciples left the mountaintop –

and we are going to meet the world in urgent need.

And just what do we have to give them?

(Or will we just drive past them?)

Catch a vision of the Christian life!

But do more than that: live it!

It does not come without a spiritual struggle.

It does not come without a cross.

It is not just a Cinderella story.

But where there is a struggle, there is a victory.

Where there is a cross, there awaits a crown.

May we, this day, let the light shine through! Amen.