

# “Transfigured”

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The Last Sunday after Epiphany  
St. Michael's Episcopal Church  
Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God. Amen.

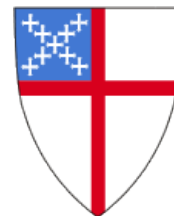
- Richard Rohr once said, “A pain that is not transformed, is transmitted.”
  - Another way of describing “a pain transformed” might be “a pain transfigured.”
- Sorry to jump right into the heavy stuff today.
  - Sometimes I open with a funny or interesting observation.
  - And sometimes I dive directly into the deep end. I hope that’s ok.
- When a pain is physical, how do we tend to process it?
  - Most of the time I think we try to get it to stop right away.
  - The classic example is the hand on the hot stove.
  - We don’t try to transform it, or transfigure it.
  - We pull our hand away instantly, to fix the pain.
  - Maybe you put some ice on our hand after that. We do the exact opposite of the pain to bring instant relief.
  - If it’s a more chronic pain that we don’t have a fix for...
  - We may take pain relievers, which remove the feeling of the pain but don’t address the source of it.
- Of course Richard Rohr is not talking about physical pain
  - He’s talking about emotional pain. Maybe even spiritual pain.
  - And yet, we often treat those two types of pain the same way.
  - We may try to solve the emotional pain instantly
  - And if we can’t, we become desperate to distract ourselves from it. We medicate it. As long as we don’t feel the pain, we can ignore the source.

- In other words, the pain is un-transformed. Un-transfigured.
  - And what did Richard Rohr say about that? Remember?
  - He said the pain will inevitably become *transmitted*.
  - It will be foisted on strangers, or co-workers, or fellow parishioners, or (most often, sadly) on loved ones.
- I'm afraid that we modern people don't spend much time thinking about transformation... How to transform our pain
  - And we use the word "transfigured" even less.
  - So how do we approach a Gospel reading like this: the "Transfiguration"?
  - ...And it's accompanying Old Testament reading, about the face of Moses being transfigured, shining like the sun just like Jesus shone brightly on the top of the mountain?
  - Is it an epiphany? (being appropriately recounted on the last Sunday after Epiphany)? Is it a theophany? Is it a spiritual and mystical encounter?
  - I think this question is important, because it forces us to consider whether the Transfiguration is a reflection of something phenomenal, or a window into the true nature of reality
- If I saw something like what Peter, James and John saw, it would be a once-in-a-lifetime event for me.
  - It's all I would be able to talk about. Because it's such a departure from normal experience.
  - This man I'd been following for a year or more all of a sudden looks like a fallen star.
  - But maybe it's every *other* day that was strange.

- This one day in Jesus' life may have been the closest he ever came to looking like himself. Not because he was God (although he was that) but because he is the ultimate human.
- Perhaps this is what humans are *supposed* to look like.
- Perhaps that is what we will all look like, once our bodies are perfected, and our souls are ascended
- And perhaps Moses and Elijah were always hanging around Jesus, but this was the moment he chose to let his disciples see them.
- But in order for Jesus to be Immanuel: God *with* us, the Word of God made *flesh*, he had to cover all this up.
- He had to conceal his brilliant illumination, and join us in our dullness, in our earthiness. He had to conceal the presence of our helpers and angels, and join us in our blindness, unable to see our spiritual guides and the cloud of witnesses surrounding us at all times.
- Yes, Jesus was (and is) God
  - And yes, Jesus came to show us God in a way that we had refused to see God.
  - But even more than that, I believe Jesus came to show us ourselves... by looking at him.
  - I think Jesus might say “Hey, your humanity has been twisted, veiled, clouded, muddied. That dirt caked all over you, that’s not your skin. The real you is underneath all that.”
  - And he covered himself with that same dirt so that we would recognize him as One Of Us.

- But in one brief, shining moment he chose to appear without it, so we could see what you and I were truly created to be.
- If you've heard me preach a lot, you're probably getting used to this kind of reading from me.
  - Flipping a Gospel scene on its head to turn it into an Oprah moment
  - But I'll tell you who would probably agree with me: The Apostle Paul.
  - He talks about that "veil" as the thing that Moses covers his shining face with, so he can interact with people.
  - It is the first step of Incarnation – to be "fully with" the people around us
  - But the second step is to remove the veil. To scrub off the mud and dirt, and to see how we shine like the sun.
  - [Read from 2 Corinthians] "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom..."
- So how do we "transfigure" our pain?
  - Of course we all want to avoid transmitting it.
  - We don't want our kids or our friends to suffer just because we've suffered.
  - The answer is naturally going to be different for every one of us.
  - But I believe it starts with knowing who we really are.
  - That this mud that covers us is not our skin
  - And the dullness of our glory... the confusion, the heartache, all the things we seek out to distract us
- These are not who we are. We were made to shine like the sun.
  - We were made to be free. So be transfigured. And be free.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the  
**Last Sunday after Epiphany**



Year C  
RCL

Exodus 34:29-35  
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2  
Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]  
Psalm 99

### The Collect

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Old Testament

#### **Exodus 34:29-35**

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out,

and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

## The Psalm

### Psalm 99

Dominus regnavit

- 1 **T**he LORD is King;  
let the people tremble; \*  
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;  
let the earth shake.
- 2 The LORD is great in Zion; \*  
he is high above all peoples.
- 3 Let them confess his Name, which is great and awesome; \*  
he is the Holy One.
- 4 "O mighty King, lover of justice,  
you have established equity; \*  
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob."
- 5 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God  
and fall down before his footstool; \*  
he is the Holy One.
- 6 Moses and Aaron among his priests,  
and Samuel among those who call upon his Name, \*  
they called upon the LORD, and he answered them.
- 7 He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; \*  
they kept his testimonies and the decree that he gave them.
- 8 O LORD our God, you answered them indeed; \*  
you were a God who forgave them,  
yet punished them for their evil deeds.

9 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God  
and worship him upon his holy hill; \*  
for the LORD our God is the Holy One.

## The New Testament

### **2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2**

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

## The Gospel

### **Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]**

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were



weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

[On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.]

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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