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AMDG

Transfiguration A – August 6, 2017

“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,” Even without the voice saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen...” this is about the weirdest scene you’ll find in the Gospel. It is among only a handful of events that’s in all three of the synoptic Gospels, with details that are more consistent with each other than the Nativity, Passion, or Resurrection. This is an important event. And it is one of my favorite in the life of Jesus, because I think it helps us understand the different levels at which we approach our relationship with Jesus and with God.

At the first level, there’s a focus on the supernatural event - Jesus becoming resplendent and an object of worship. How the disciples respond to this event mirrors my relationship with Jesus at this stage. Focusing on the transcendent nature of Christ, I am at a distance. I put the Transfigured Savior “up there” and put myself with the apostles. This stage of my Christian journey is marked by excessive piety, basically performing for my other-wordly God. It’s a relationship that’s more transactional than transformational.

At the second level of understanding, my focus is scholarly. I compare this story with other stories of transfiguration in the Bible. I’m fascinated with all the parallels in scripture. I marvel at the intentional placement of Jesus in between Moses and Elijah, symbolizing Jesus as fulfillment of the law (represented by Moses) and the prophets (symbolized by Elijah) And, there’s also the foreshadowing of the resurrection as a literary device. In Jesus’ resurrection he would become dazzling to the point where his disciples didn’t recognize him at first. At this level there’s still a remoteness in how I approach this event and how I relate to it. The transfigured Jesus and his disciples are objects of my analysis, and while the details I discover are fascinating and bolster my belief system, they may not necessarily bring me into a closer

relationship to God. For that closeness, I need to come to a more intimate understanding of the Transfiguration.

At this stage I find myself focusing on how this event shows transformative nature of our relationship with God in Jesus. I see the Transfiguration as a revelation of our own transfiguration, Jesus revealing our true natures as one with God. In theological terms this is called Divinization or Theosis - the process by which we become one with God, in which the fullness of our True Selves is revealed. And at this stage the Transfiguration teaches me about how I see myself and God, and how I see others and God - I am the object of transfiguration; I am the beloved...and so are you.

This idea that we each have within us much more than meets the eye, can be startling. M. Scott Peck, author *The Road Less Travelled*, put it this way, "For no matter how much we may like to pussyfoot around it, all of us who postulate a loving God and really think about it, eventually come to a single terrifying idea: God wants us to become Himself... We are growing toward godhood."

It is truly a terrifying idea, that God wants us to become like God, or united with God. And, it is especially terrifying when we are particularly attached to the world...our bodies, our possessions, our preferences, our resentments, our beliefs... our lives. What Jesus seems to teach us is that if we expect to be transformed by our relationship to God, we have to let go of our hold on the world. Jesus made his most upsetting statements to teach this. "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; ... if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out," or "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;" or the more succinct "whoever would save his life will lose it." These and the many other extreme statements about the cost of living the God life are not about despising the world and everything about it. They are about remembering that everything in this world, however valuable and beautiful, should never be the object of singular devotion or attachment.

And yet, it is in this world that we catch glimpses of the divine, and not just on hoy mihtains.. It is through our senses that we come to know the grandeur and glory of God; it is in our interactions with others that we allow God's love to be shared. The Transfiguration is one of the more

glorious ways in which Jesus revealed to his disciples a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. In Celtic Spirituality the experience of “the other world” in this world happens in “thin places,” where the veil between the two worlds is nearly transparent and where “other worldly” experiences happen for those who are aware. I believe we are all capable of being those “thin places,” and having intense experiences in which we know we’ve been touched by God. A piece of music, a special relationship, a scene in nature, a joyful gathering with those we love. At these moments in life we do feel a unity with God and with God’s creation, we feel we’ve had a glimpse of the divine – just like Peter, James, and John on the mountaintop with Jesus.

We also experience this grace of a glimpse of our true selves in acts of love. Jesus demonstrated and taught this over and over in his ministry. In acts of listening to those who are troubled, in forgiving of those who have harmed us, in humbly asking forgiveness of those we have harmed; in healing the sick, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger; in tending to the dying and the grieving. In going to those places in our lives we’d rather not go. That’s where we can experience a taste of our own transfigurations, because in those times of letting go - letting go of anger, of shame, of fear, of disgust, of judgment - in letting go we open ourselves to God working in and through us. We open ourselves to Divinization.

When we walk with Jesus, when we let go of our own self-reliance and self-sufficiency and open ourselves to the transformative love of God, everything begins to change. We notice our lives have new meaning. We are no longer burdened by the fear, resentment, and guilt that may have plagued us. Serenity and peace enter our lives. The possessions and ideas we think define us, that we thought could never do without, no longer seem as important. The people we would shy away from, in the Christ life we become drawn to. We find ourselves more eager to help others – the lonely, the poor, the homeless, the suffering, the stranger, the sick and dying. The people who used to annoy us we feel compassion for. We become less interested in our own wants and more interested in our fellows. And we suddenly realize God is doing for us what we were never able to do for ourselves.

Yes, it is by embracing those things we once feared that we open ourselves to God's transformative love. We cannot transform our own lives, we cannot create our own transfigurations. If we could, we would want things to be more of the same. Worldly possessions, our hobbies, and interests, those would make us resplendent...but they do not, over time they often make us bored and discontent. It's when we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us that we get glimpses of our true natures as God's beloved.

We are the body of Christ. Jesus' Transfiguration points to our own transfiguration here in this life and in our future life in the new creation. Let us pray that God may open us more and more to be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.