

Transfiguration - A - 2/3/08 – Matthew 17:1-9 – Transformed By Grace - Pastor Charlie

Today will be a life transforming event for twenty-two 9th and 10th graders as they confirm their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior and commit themselves to a life of discipleship. It's a moment each of us should take pride in. Fifteen or sixteen years ago we witnessed God's claim upon their lives in baptism. We heard God say, "You are my child; I take delight in you." At that time, we had no idea where God would lead them, what gifts they might possess, or what life events might lie before them. Nevertheless, we welcomed them into this community and began the journey of faith together. Some of us held them lovingly in the nursery; others shared faith as a Sunday school or Vacation Bible school teacher; others as faith mentors; and still others as family friends who encouraged and supported them. All of us shared in this collective journey as we prayed for each other, welcomed them on Sunday morning, modeled faith, and took pride in their service activities and leadership. On more than one occasion their faith has touched our hearts and brought tears of joy to our eyes.

Like baptism, confirmation is a life-changing experience. It sends us down a path that isn't always easy or popular or convenient to follow. Peer pressure, distractions, cultural addictions, and seductive voices all clamor for our attention and bid us to leave the path and walk in different directions. Our work as parents and mentors is far from over. Confirmation isn't graduation that leads us into retirement. Rather, it is a continuation, a milestone in the life-long journey of faith. In many ways, now the real work begins because these youth are self-motivated and will make life decisions based on their core values and beliefs. As we think about these young people confirming their faith and choosing to follow Jesus, we might do well to think back to our own confirmation and the path we've walked since then. If someone had videotaped our life and we sat down to look at where we had been and how we are now living, what would we observe? How has Jesus' claim on our life transformed us?

The Transfiguration is a milestone experience in the lives of Peter, James and John. It enabled them to see with clarity who Jesus really was and not who they wanted him to be. This mountaintop experience follows on the heels of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, and Jesus saying that he will suffer, be crucified and die. The disciples simply could not hold together God's Messiah, crucifixion and death. The Transfiguration wasn't so much for Jesus as it was for his disciples. It was an event they could go back to over and over; an experience from which they could get their bearings and get back on the right path.

We all need mountaintop experiences we can go back to; milestone moments when we've experience God's presence in unexplainable yet life transforming ways, perhaps in the birth of a child or the love of a spouse; the deep joy and meaning from helping someone who couldn't repay us; a child or teenager who says, "Thank you; you've made a huge difference in my life"; being on retreat or watching the sun rise or set. But we never stay on these mountaintops. Life quickly shifts gears and returns to its normal routines. Memory serves as a time machine that transports us back in time, allowing us to remember and draw strength from the past so we can then go forward looking and longing for the next encounter and experience of God.

The thing about these mountaintop experiences is this: They are meant more for us than for Jesus. They are a gift of God's grace, a moment in time that is meant to open our eyes, fill us with the wonder of God's presence, alter the way we view life and each other, and set our feet walking in the direction of God's Kingdom. They set our hearts ablaze with God's presence and love, and we find our lives transformed by God's grace.

There is a wonderful image in the Harry Potter book, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. Harry is attending the wedding of two dear friends, Bill and Fleur. Fleur is so beautiful (magically beautiful) that usually her beauty eclipses everyone around her. Men are rendered speechless; women seethe with envy. But on her wedding day, Fleur wears an elfin-made tiara that exerts a different sort of magic. When she wears it, the tiara transfigures those around her. She is no longer the center of attention. Instead, everyone around her seems to glow. Her tiara renders the other person beautiful, and the wedding guests cannot understand how they never noticed it before: how the faces of those around them shine.

So now, in this service, we come into the presence of Jesus. We have been invited to step out of our busy schedules and to come apart with him, to remember who he is and be transfigured by God's love. In a moment, we'll touch his body, be consumed by his presence, and transformed by his love. As with Peter, James and John, feel Jesus' touch upon your shoulder and hear him say, "Get up and do not be afraid. I am with you." Then hear these deceptively simple words - life transforming words. "Listen to him," God says. "Listen to him." Are we listening? Are we following? What does the videotape of our lives reveal?