

“Reflecting God’s Glory”

Sermon – March 3, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

Hetero. A Greek word meaning “different” or “other.” We use it in English as prefix for some word, like heterodox, which are beliefs or practices different from accepted or official ones.

Or heterogeneous meaning something composed of parts of different kinds, like oil and vinegar in Italian salad dressing.

If we only had Luke’s gospel, today might be called “Different Day” because unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke does not describe the change in Jesus with the Greek word *metamorphoó* [meh-tah-mor-FOH-oh], from which we get our English word “metamorphosis” and what the Greek Orthodox church calls the event. But through the Latin bible we have translated it as “transfiguration.”

Luke says the appearance of Jesus face was “changed” or, literally, “made different”.

Luke’s story actually has several things *different* from the other accounts.

For example, the event happens “eight days after” instead of six;

we hear what Moses and Elijah are talking about;

the disciples are “weighed down with sleep”;

God calls Jesus “the Chosen” and not “Beloved”;

and perhaps most notable, this took place when Jesus is *praying*.

In Luke’s gospel and Acts of the Apostles, prayer often sets the stage for major events, decisions, and ministry moments.

But let’s step back for a minute and put this all in context.

Recounted in all three Synoptic Gospels as well as in 2 Peter (1:16–18), the

Transfiguration is one of the most well-attested events in Jesus’ life.

In the Gospels, the story always appears after Jesus’ first passion

prediction, as the focus of ministry shifts toward Jerusalem.

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Thus, Transfiguration Sunday stands at the juncture between Epiphany and the season of Lent, and as such, offers a glimpse forward to the Easter Season and the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ.

The significance of today’s story is that it occurs “eight” days after Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah. After which Jesus says he will suffer, be rejected, killed and raised and for any who want to be his disciples, “let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

You might say Jesus is showing how he is the “Son of Man”, the human side of his nature.

Today’s story has Jesus on a mountaintop, metaphorically close to God and now is shown, literally, to be different, to be in “glory”, as a sign of God’s presence, showing Jesus’ divine nature as the “Son of God.”

This is bolstered by the presence of Moses and Elijah, two who truly knew the will of God and had both been on mountains to receive revelation. Moses, the great lawgiver, had seen the glory of God, as we heard in today’s Old Testament lesson from Exodus where Moses face shone because he had been talking with God.

And Elijah, the great prophet, was taken up to heaven in a chariot, not having died.

And both were expected to appear at the coming of the messianic age.

But this “glorious” gathering was also sobering.

Again, unique to Luke, we hear the content of conversation among Jesus, Moses, and Elijah: they “were speaking of his departure’, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31).

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The Greek word we translate as “departure” is “exodos.” And just as God saved the Israelites with the great liberation from Egypt, Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension—events soon to happen in Jerusalem—will serve as a New Exodus within the larger story of God’s saving purpose for humanity.

Moses and Elijah confirm that this is the will of God for Jesus. The way of God for Jesus cannot bypass the cross.

This is at the heart of our Christian faith: that Jesus has come to reveal God and redeem humanity.

Then for the second and last time in the gospel, we hear God speak directly. The first time was at Jesus’ baptism, or Incarnation, when a voice from heaven said to Jesus’ “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Now the voice from the overshadowing cloud speaks to the disciples present and says, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him! Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke uses “Chosen” here instead of “Beloved”, the Greek word meaning “called out” and same word used when Jesus “chose” the Twelve.

The implication is that now one greater than Moses and Elijah has taken their place.

The Incarnation and Transfiguration events complement each other in striking ways.

In the Incarnation, the divine partakes of the human condition.

In the Transfiguration, the human shares in divine glory.

In the Incarnation, the Son of God takes on human form and resides with us mortals on earth.

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In the Transfiguration, the earthly Jesus shares for a moment the company of two great and worthy residents of heaven, Moses and Elijah.

In the Incarnation, the divine partakes of the human condition.

In the Transfiguration, the human shares in divine glory.

Though the disciples don’t—and won’t until after Jesus’ resurrection—really grasp what it is all about, the transfiguration shows them a *different* Jesus. The disciples have seen Jesus as a rabbi, leader, and even friend, and this prevents them from seeing Jesus as God, as the great king and ruler of the universe. The transfiguration shows them that.

And while this story is clearly for Peter, James, and John and for the hearers who are invited into the inner circle, it may also be for Jesus himself. While he knew he was God’s beloved and the Messiah, now in the presence of witnesses he is confirmed to be the Son of God, precisely because of that, chosen by God for the sacrifice he knows he must make.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord is a day that gives us a glimpse of the coming future glory of Christ on Easter. But it also reminds us that the way to Easter is through the cross.

Yet, what are we do as a result? The event is profound yet cryptic, spontaneous yet connected to other events, and transformative yet changing little about pressing challenges we face today.

One of the lessons of this text is that the glory of God is only possible if lived together, in community. Nobody, not even Jesus, could shine alone! Glory is only possible if shared and that means that we are to share the light of Christ to the world, especially those placed in the shadows of our society.

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When we light the lives of those placed in the shadows of society, we must know that it is from those shadows, from those clouds that the voice of God appears, affirming Jesus.

Our stories -- our ministries -- are preceded by and rooted in past actions of God and, at their best, are moving toward the future that God has in store for us and for the whole creation.

When our actions align with the leading of the Spirit and the ways of God, God’s glory becomes visible; the ways of God become embodied in us and what we do.

This is why we have hope, and why we need not lose heart. Amidst whatever is taking place in our lives, God’s mercy is at work.

We are “different” because Jesus was “different”. So, let’s go make a difference.

In the name of the God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.