**February 15, 2015 – Feast of the Transfiguration**

**(Last Sunday after the Epiphany)**

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Don’t you just love our liturgical calendar? Time and tradition has smoothed and polished our liturgical year like old silver. Take the season after Epiphany, for instance. It starts with the Feast of Epiphany, which we celebrate every year on January 6th, or Twelfth Night, with Matthew’s story of the coming of the three wise men. Then the season after Epiphany begins on the following Sunday with the account of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan and ends today with the feast of the Transfiguration. It’s a beautifully constructed story from beginning to end.

So here we are. We’ve just heard Mark’s account of Jesus and three of his disciples climbing to a mountain top, where Jesus is changed before their eyes and once again, like at his baptism, a voice comes from heaven saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

I love Mark’s version of this story. Peter and the others have just witnessed this amazing otherworldly event and Peter is struck speechless. But like a lot of people who are speechless, as soon as they find their voice again, they say something dumb. I know I do that a lot!

Funny story – while we were in Seminary, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, came to New York to speak at a conference being held at Trinity Wall Street. The Dean of the Seminary also got him to come and speak at General, which was a pretty big thrill for us – even those of us who didn’t exactly agree with some of his ideas.

So we gathered in the dining hall, which looks very similar to Hogwarts – all oak beams and stained glass windows, and walls lined with pictures of past deans and Episcopal luminaries. Since most of us were Episcopalians, everyone sat in the back, but I decided to sit closer and found a place in the empty second row. Not the FIRST row, of course!

When the Archbishop and his retinue came in, they headed for the seats right in front of us and before he sat down, the ABC, as we all called him, turned around and shook hands with those of us who were bravely sitting in the second row. (By that time the room had filled up, so I wasn’t alone.) He was very nice and gracious and that moment was one of the highlights of my time at General. Well, it might have been THE highlight except for what came next.

After Rowan, as we all also called him like we were pals who regularly had tea together, sat down, he was looking around at all of the pictures on the walls. Bear in mind that some of these pictures are nearly three hundred years old. I don’t know what possessed me at that very Peter-like moment, but I leaned forward and said, “See anybody you know?” As I said, he was very gracious and said, “Yes, a few,” without missing a beat. But I wanted to sink into the floor!

So that’s the reason I like Mark’s version of the Transfiguration. Matthew and Luke make Peter seem a lot cooler than I think anyone would be under the circumstances, but Mark makes him seem just as human as I am, which the way I like my saints to be.

So here we have our three very human disciples coming face to face with a dazzlingly transformed Jesus, along with two of the greatest figures in Jewish history, Moses and Elijah. Jesus doesn’t warn Peter, James, and John about what would happen at the mountain top. He doesn’t explain it afterwards. It just happens, and the disciples, and we, are left to make sense of it.

So how do we make sense of this supernatural event? I keep coming back to the word for transfigure. The Greek word is *metamorphóo*, which means, “to change one’s form to be in keeping with one’s inner reality.” In other words, Jesus is transformed into something more closely resembling his true self, which is too bright and beautiful for them to comprehend.

Still, Peter’s first response is to want to keep Jesus that way – to stop time and stay on that mountain top and worship there. But God had other plans for them – plans that involved fear and pain and death, to go along with the glory of the transfigured Christ.

Don’t we all experience moments like that? Moments where we would like the world to stop so that nothing would change? I had a feeling like that just a couple of weeks ago at the clergy retreat. It was so uplifting and spiritually nourishing that I wanted it to go on forever. But that’s not what we are called to do. We are called to come down from the mountain top and engage with the real world. Transfiguration implies change and movement, not status quo.

Jesus showed the disciples a vision of the end of the journey, not so they could stay there and skip everything that comes in between, but so they would have hope in the darkest time. I think in our heart of hearts, we would all like to arrive at the empty tomb without first having to experience the Cross, but that’s not what we’re being called to do. Our way lies through Good Friday, not around it.

The last thing the disciples hear before this wonderful vision goes away and life is normal again, is the voice of God saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” This is no ordinary man, as you have just witnessed. This is God’s son, and he has much to tell us if we only listen to him. He has much to show us, if we only follow him. He has much to teach us, if we only pay attention.

That is what the Transfiguration is for. It’s to remind us once again to wake up and pay attention! God is here right now, among us, speaking to us, living with us. This is a mystical event, certainly, but it’s also a very real call to action. We can no longer stay in one place. God is calling us to move, to enter into that light, to change.

To be transfigured, ourselves, into the image of Christ.

But change isn’t always fun. It isn’t always easy. In fact, more often than not, it’s the opposite of fun and easy. But it’s what we’re being called to do. WE are being called to bring that dazzling light of Christ in the world. WE are called to show God’s transforming love to a society that would really rather not hear about it.

Jesus told Peter, James, and John not to tell anyone about what they had seen and heard on that mountain, until he had risen from the dead. But they couldn’t unsee it. They couldn’t unhear that voice from heaven proclaiming their friend to be God’s beloved son. Those were their gifts to help them through the tough road ahead. And they are our gifts too, to help carry us through the dark days.

I want to close with a poem that I love by Malcolm Guite, a sonnet, actually, on the Feast of the Transfiguration.

***A Sonnet for the Feast of the Transfiguration* by Malcolm Guite**

For that one moment, ‘in and out of time’,

On that one mountain where all moments meet,

The daily veil that covers the sublime

In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.

There were no angels full of eyes and wings

Just living glory full of truth and grace.

The Love that dances at the heart of things

Shone out upon us from a human face

And to that light the light in us leaped up,

We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,

A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope

Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.

Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar

Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.

Amen.