

**“God’s Touch” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
February 22, 2020 Transfiguration Sunday
Matthew 17: 1-9, Second Peter 1: 16-21, Exodus 24:12-18**

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Can't you just see it up there on the big screen? Moses' long beard blowing in the wind, grasping the rocks around him to keep the strong wind from blowing him off the mountain. As the camera pans the scene from a distance, a dark, ominous cloud covers the mountain top. Bolts of lightning, flashes and thunder. You know God is in the thunder talking to Moses. The scene switches to Moses coming down the mountain, his face glowing, iridescent. He's holding two tablets of stone. Wait! Why Moses looks like Charlton Heston!

The Bible is full of drama and exciting events like those depicted in the movie, *The Ten Commandments*. Today's Gospel lesson contains no less mystery and drama. Jesus walking up the mountain with Peter, James and John when suddenly Jesus becomes dazzling white – almost translucent. Two other people appear out of thin air and begin talking to Jesus. We later learn they are Moses and Elijah. Peter, James and John are puzzled. They cannot figure out what's happening to Jesus, the man they had walked and talked with, had eaten with. They knew there was something different about him and now this. The camera focuses on Peter's face. You can see the puzzlement, the wonder, the questions in his expression. Then a bright cloud, somehow full of light, fills the whole scene. A voice booms out, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Peter, James and John fall face down on the ground. The bright light disappears as quickly as it appeared leaving Jesus alone with Peter, James and John. And what does Jesus say to Peter, James and John? "Tell no one about the vision."

Many in our society would probably consider the transfiguration a myth, a made-up tale invented by Jesus' disciples. We live in a society that seeks an explanation for everything. There are many people who believe in the human Jesus, not the divine Jesus. Jesus was simply a great teacher like Buddha or Gandhi or Socrates. Jesus gave us true principles by which to live.

Then there are those who believe in Jesus. A little boy had to spend the night in the hospital after having his tonsils taken out. He knew to push the call button if he needed help, but he didn't know his hospital room had an intercom connected to the nurses' station. Soon his light flashed. The nurse called his name and asked what he wanted. There was complete silence. The nurse repeated herself. After a long pause the young boy said, "Jesus, I hear you, but I don't see you. Where are you?" Yes, there are those who have faith in Jesus and believe what the Bible says.

Those of you who attend the church's Bible studies know that I often ask, "What can we learn from this Bible story?" And that's the question today. What does the transfiguration say to us today, given we live in a society that has little room for mystery or the supernatural?

To answer that question, let's consider what the transfiguration may have said to those living in Jesus' time. The disciples had witnessed Jesus' baptism where God broke into time and space with words similar to those quoted in this Matthew verse. Again and again the disciples had observed Jesus healing common people of disease. They had seen Jesus drive a legion of demons out of a man in the Gerasenes. Why there were so many demons in this man that when the demons left him and went into a herd of pigs, the whole herd rushed into the sea and drowned. Yes, the disciples knew Jesus was full of God's power. But Jesus still looked like them.

Jesus' transfiguration revealed Jesus as divine. He was truly the Son of God as Jesus claimed to be. He was not just another great man, a great teacher, a person who gave us worthy rules to live by. The transfiguration reinforced the conversation Jesus and Peter had that is recorded in Matthew 16, beginning at the 15th verse: **¹⁵ He [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."**

I'm sure the disciples and the other followers of Jesus realized after the resurrection that the transfiguration reinforced what Jesus had said about life after death. During the transfiguration, Jesus was talking to Moses and Elijah – both of whom were dead. But here they were, alive, and talking to Jesus.

Indeed, the appearance of Moses and Elijah prepared the disciples to live through the horror of the crucifixion and the chaos and disbelief that was to come as the disciples' world fell apart. Jesus' arrest. The disciples deserting him. Peter's denials. The crucifixion. The pain and loss. The resurrection. In today's scripture from Second Peter, Peter clearly says how the transfiguration helped him and the disciples. Let me read those verses again. **¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.**

The transfiguration prepared the disciples to live in a post resurrection world where they would no longer have Jesus' physical presence. They would no longer be able to ask him questions or to learn from him. They could look back on that mountain top experience and endure what was coming because they knew they had put their faith in the Son of God.

Likewise, God prepares us through the transfiguration of Jesus to live in our world of doubters and skeptics. We, like the disciples can be assured that this Jesus, this human who spoke divine truths, was not just another great teacher. This Jesus was God who came to earth to show us how to live. This Jesus came to earth to show us how much God loves us. Jesus' transfiguration and resurrection showed us that we can have eternal life.

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Lent is the season of the church calendar where we walk with Christ to the cross and then celebrate his glorious resurrection on Easter. Transfiguration Sunday is our mountain top experience with Jesus and the disciples. You could say that this Sunday, transfiguration Sunday, prepares us to walk through Lent and gives us the last bit of God's glory we enjoy for a while – until Easter.

The giving of the Ten Commandments and the transfiguration shared similar characteristics as stories. But there is one difference I'd like to point out to you. You may remember that Moses had the people purify themselves before he went to talk to God. And the people could not touch the holy mountain, or they would die.

How does the transfiguration story end? Verse 7: **7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."** Jesus touched them. Jesus is holy, Jesus is divine, yet he reaches out to touch each of us, to care for us, to love us, no matter what we may be dealing with in our lives.

What is it about touch? A person touching us can comfort us when we are afraid, can't it? Here the God who made earth and all that is in it; the God who's greatness cannot be described; the God whose glory had just been revealed - reaches out to touch and comfort three of his disciples who were afraid. Jesus offers that same touch to you and me today.

In the transfiguration, Jesus was luminous. He appeared glorious. But after that event, Jesus returned to his humanity. He lived among us and taught about God and God's love for us. Yes, God loves us and sent Jesus to us to show us that great love. Jesus touched the disciples. May we too be touched by Jesus. May we be transfigured by God's love for us.