

Sunday Sermon
February 11, 2018
Mark 9:2-9
“Transformed”

Introduction

One spring, when our daughter was in high school, I went with her to the junior class fashion show. It was a fundraiser for their prom. It was fun seeing the students transformed from blue jeans and t-shirts into prom dresses and tuxedos. I could hardly recognize them.

Halfway through the show, they stopped and drew door prizes. And they called my name. I had won a free makeover. I was so excited. I went home and told my husband, “I am going to be made over. A new me. It is going to be great.”

I made the appointment and arranged my work schedule. I blocked out a whole afternoon. I figured a makeover would take a while. On the day of the appointment I drove across town, excited to see what was going to happen.

Do you know what the woman did? She cut my hair. That is it. It had been a donation, a giveaway, and she really had no interest or time to do anything besides a haircut. I was back home in less than an hour. And I really did not look that different. I was so disappointed. There was no transformation.

But my dear spouse said, “I am glad she did not make you over. I like you the way you are.”

I

I wonder: In a culture of extreme makeovers, do we really know what it means to be transformed?

Jesus takes three disciples, Peter and the brothers James, and John, up on a high mountain. Mark says that while praying, Jesus is transfigured. His face begins to shine; his clothes become dazzling white. And with him appear two men, Moses the great lawgiver and Elijah the great prophet. It was a transfiguration.

Now in the Harry Potter books, transfiguration is a required class at Hogwarts. There, transfiguration is a matter of changing one thing into something else by using your wand or charms or spells. In one scene, young Harry and Ron look on with amazement as a raven is transformed into a goblet before their eyes.

But in his transfiguration, Jesus is not changed into something else. No, Jesus becomes more of who he is, a member of the divine Trinity, a very part of God. And he shines with the glory of God.

The disciples look on with amazement. They do not understand what they are seeing. James and John are struck speechless.

But Peter, good ole impulsive Peter, starts talking, “This is great,” he says. “We should build something up here, a Makeover Mansion or a Transfiguration

Tower, with three sections to honor each of you.”

And just then, a cloud overshadows them, and there comes a voice: “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”

“Stop talking, Peter. Don’t build anything. Don’t plan anything. Just listen.”

I wonder: Can we hear that voice speaking to us as we begin Lent? “This is my beloved Son. Slow down. Listen.”

II

Do you wonder why, when Jesus and the disciples are coming down from the mountain, he suggests that they not tell anyone what they have seen and heard? The disciples have been traveling with Jesus for a good while. They know he is special. He teaches wonderful things; he tells important stories; he heals people; he even walks on water.

But on the mount of transfiguration, God draws back the disciples’ veil of ignorance and misunderstanding so they can see Jesus clearly, illuminated. And they see that he is more than just a special person; he is divine. And he shines like no person ever has or ever will.

Yet Jesus knows one mountaintop experience is not enough to prepare them for the journey of discipleship. Growing into discipleship is an ongoing transformation that happens over and over, for them and for us.

Perhaps the most important message we hear on this Sunday before Lent begins, is this:

“And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”

III

This Transfiguration story comes about halfway through the narrative of Mark’s gospel, halfway between the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and the cross to show us a defining moment in his journey to the cross. This Transfiguration story comes to us at the beginning of Lent to give us the voice of God pronouncing a blessing on Jesus before we hear the stories of Lent that pronounce condemnation. But it also comes to us as a defining moment to show us that this Lenten journey can be one of transformation.

In these next six weeks, we have the opportunity to practice holy habits, things we do that mark us as Christians, even as they help make us Christians.

You may choose to give up something, a habit or an item that comes between you and God. Or you may choose to take up something, more prayer or bible study, or acts of service that will lead you closer to God.

Either way, these habits will be transforming. They will take discipline, but as you do them, God will change you, remake you in the image of God’s beloved Son Jesus. And that is a makeover that cannot be won as a prize or scheduled in an

afternoon appointment.

Conclusion:

I saw an advertisement this week, for a makeover. “A makeover from us,” the business said, “will boost your self-confidence, your self-esteem, and your happiness; it will change your life.”

As if remaking the outside of you will remake you inside. But Jesus said it is not what is on the outside that is important, but what proceeds from the heart. Unless you are remade from the inside, no amount of work on the outside can change who you are.

That inside work is God’s work of transformation. And true transformation is God making us not what we want to be, but what God wants us to be, remade in the likeness of our Lord with a heart to do the Lord’s work in the world.

It is here: Lent. As we journey, may we see with unveiled faces the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror. And may we be transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, through our Lord’s Spirit. Amen.

Time of Prayer ending with The Lord's Prayer

God, hear our prayers for these ones mentioned and for others not mentioned but known by you. God, we long for glimpses of your splendor and for the day when the whole earth will be awash with your glory. Help us to recognize the hidden glory of the cross.

May its splendor sustain particularly these ones we have lifted in name to you, in times of suffering.

May its love compel us to minister in Christ's name to these named and to the many others in a suffering world.

May we find our true life in Christ who suffered there for our sakes. Hear us now as we pray the prayer he taught us, The Lord's Prayer, saying . . .

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.