

## ***“I Believe; Help My Unbelief”***

Transfiguration Sunday, February 11, 2018  
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Mark 9: 2-9, 14-28

<sup>2</sup> Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” <sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” <sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

<sup>14</sup> When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. <sup>15</sup> When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. <sup>16</sup> He asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” <sup>17</sup> Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; <sup>18</sup> and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.” <sup>19</sup> He answered them, “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.”

<sup>20</sup> And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. <sup>21</sup> Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. <sup>22</sup> It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to him, “If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.” <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

<sup>25</sup> When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!” <sup>26</sup> After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.

<sup>28</sup> When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” <sup>29</sup> He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

### Sermon

The story of Christ and his disciples’ mountaintop experience  
is so memorable it is re-told in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter.  
(Mt 17.1—8; Mk 9: 2-9; Lk 9.28—36; 2 Pet 1.16—18)

In Mark 9, we overhear the Gospel story of the Transfiguration of Jesus  
and his subsequent healing of a child and the faith walk of the child’s father.  
Listen for the Word of God:

*“Six days later,  
Jesus took with him Peter and James and John,*

*and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.  
And he was transfigured before them,  
and his clothes became dazzling white,  
such as no one on earth could bleach them.  
And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.” –Mark 9: 2-4*

*"And he was transfigured before them..."*

Trans is a Latin root word meaning across, beyond, through.  
Used as a prefix, trans describes when something or someone  
is changed thoroughly, altered, made different than what it or we once were.  
Transylvania University was founded further west than any college in it's day,  
founded over there, through the woods, trans-syl-vania,  
or, to put it in southern talk, o'er yonder.  
To transcend is to rise above, to go beyond, eclipse, outshine.  
To be transformed is to be reformed, renewed, remade in God's image.  
To be transfigured like Jesus was atop a high mountain  
is to transform into something more beautiful or elevated,  
to change, alter, to experience a metamorphosis.

*And Jesus was transfigured before them...*

Peter and James and John saw Him aglow,  
flanked by Moses and Elijah,  
the spiritual bookends of the Hebraic faith:  
Moses the Deliverer, the Liberator, the Law-Giver;  
Elijah the Prophet, the Ascendant, the Heaven-bound Chariot Rider  
Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Rabbi, Prince of Peace

Jesus was aglow with the glory of being a child of God.  
He had recently walked on water, moving from the riverside toward his astonished disciples.  
He had raised a little girl from the dead to new life.  
He had calmed a storm, saying, "Peace! Be still."  
He had fed thousands of people, body and soul, with some bread, fish, and prayer.  
He was simultaneously overflowing with the joy of accomplishment  
and completely poured out, his cup in need of replenishing.  
He was aglow, like you feel when you know you are loved and can love in return.  
He basked in the glow of His love for God and love for the whole people of God.  
As a matter of fact,  
His mask was off;  
His thoughts and feelings laid bare;  
so transparent was He that His face shone.

As a matter of fact,  
a voice came from the cloud that surrounded them,  
saying, "*This is my Son, the beloved. Listen to him!*"

As a matter of fact,  
we, too, know that voice and that sensation, that experience,  
such spiritual nakedness whenever we allow ourselves to live inside out,  
bare, masks off, unabashed, unafraid and unashamed of our joy,  
honest about our pain, heartfelt about our struggles,  
our wrestling with God and one another,  
vulnerable, brave, real, dazzling,  
transfigured for all the world to see and marvel.

The Apostle Paul spoke of our own spiritual capacity to be transfigured, saying,

*"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." --2 Cor. 3: 18*

Each of the Gospels affirm that Jesus was transfigured...  
...and that Peter and James and John were dumbfounded.  
Sometimes there are no words.  
Sometimes you can't make this up.  
Sometimes you simply sit still, and wonder, and give God the glory,  
whenever we witness--as they did—  
a soul walking in beauty, changed from glory into glory.

And sometimes people feel they just have to say something to fill the silence.  
Which is what Peter was doing when he blurted, *"Let's build three booths!"*  
Let's make a monument, commemorate the event, memorialize the moment.  
Let's just stay here awhile, shall we.  
How about a selfie?

Could it be that the disciples three  
saw this moment of transfiguration, Jesus in dazzling white,  
as the pinnacle, the top, goal accomplished.  
What could possibly be better than this?  
Look at how far they had come, at all they had been through, over their years together!  
So many trials and tribulations and temptations, so many miles and smiles,  
tears and fears, acts of healing and hope and hospitality.  
We have made it to this point, thank the Lord!  
Surely people would understand, they would get it, they would appreciate the decision  
if those gathered atop the mountain chose to withdraw for a while,  
to withdraw from the world, withdraw from neighbors,  
withdraw from the call to serve and share in the name of Jesus?!  
Our feet are tired, our backs are weary, our wallets and purses are light,  
our spirits in constant need of replenishing weekly, daily, minute-by-minute,  
while down in the valley, down by the riverside,  
the need is so great as to be overwhelming,  
yet there is Jesus Christ,  
all aglow and looking sharp in a new suit,  
and here is God,  
speaking affirmations from the mist all around us.

Who would blame us if we changed our status on FaceBook to *DONE*.  
Surely the whole world would understand if disciples tweeted,  
*"I'm calling it a day, a life, a faith journey's end;  
gonna set myself down and build a booth for three:  
the Creator, the Son, and me."*

### ***I Believe; Help My Unbelief***

*"As they were coming down the mountain,  
[Jesus] ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen,  
until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead." --Mark 9: 9*

God in Christ grasped that after the Transfiguration,

the time had come to transcend.  
To transcend is to rise above, to go beyond, eclipse, outshine.  
There certainly is an element of transcendence in the context of worship.

The purpose of worship is to connect us with God and one another and our true self.  
Yes, let your little light shine; shout amen and alleluia;  
sing the songs of your faith; drink deep from the Cup;  
feast your soul on the Bread of Life;  
Pass the Peace of Christ—but not the flu.

Transcend.

Rise above.

Be born again, and again, and again.

Restore.

Reconnect.

Reconcile.

One Request.

Please, please do not plan to stay here *ad infinitum*.

Worship, whether in a cathedral, sanctuary, chapel, or campground,  
is not intended as a permanent pit stop.

The church is a mission station,  
a bless-ed source of renewal and restoration for the journey.  
The Bible says, "as they were coming down the mountain..."

Follow Jesus Christ down the mountainside.

Go down to the riverside.

Go on over to the town square.

Go to where cross the crowded ways of life,  
where meet the least, the lost, and the last.

Go out the cathedrals and chapels into the city and communities  
where God has set up shop,

where the Lord of the Dance invites us to join in the music,  
where the Holy Spirit is engaged in Chalice Thrift store & Hagar's House,  
at Emory Hospital ICU and in DeKalb County jail cells,  
among the lonely at the retirement center and next door.

Go on, go to where the Spirit is found among our First Responders  
and social activists and military service men and women,  
where God is beside those chosen last, last for kickball  
or last for meaningful employment or never at all,  
where Jesus stands alongside those chosen first to be sent away  
because we have the audacity and racist entitlement  
to label a child of God an illegal.

Go on, to where the Creator, the Son and the Holy Spirit are already engaged,  
already empowering, already expecting the company of our presence.

As Peter and James and John descended the mountain,  
praying with each step the Gospel might be transcendent,  
might rise and shine through them,  
Jesus warned them to be quiet about what they had seen.

Here they were, thinking they had reached the apex, the zenith of spirituality,  
had a mountaintop experience of the holiest kind.

Then Jesus said, in effect, *"My friends, you ain't seen nothing yet!  
God's next act of grace will transcend the transfiguration!  
Wait till you see what God does for an encore on Calvary!  
When God rolls that stone away on Easter morning, glory, glory, hallelujah!  
...then, and only then, go on down by the riverside, go spread the Good News.  
Do you believe this?"*

***I Believe; Help My Unbelief***

Transfigure  
Transcend  
Transform

To be transformed is to be reformed, renewed, remade *imago dei*, in God's image.

The Apostle Paul preached, *"Do not be conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,  
so that you may discern what is the will of God  
—what is good and acceptable and perfect."*—Romans 12:2

In the Gospel versions, immediately after the Transfiguration,  
as Jesus comes down from the mountain  
he is met by the father of a boy  
who suffered from seizures and convulsions.

Jesus calls for the boy to be brought before him.  
He prays.  
He is transformed into a channel of God's love.  
He eases the troubled mind of the boy's father, who says, *"I believe; help my unbelief."*  
He then casts out the demon, the sickness, the infirmity, and heals the child.  
The child, the father, the family come to themselves.  
Their inner peace shines, transfigures, and they are dazzling.

This is what the power of prayer can do.  
This is Who and Whose Jesus is.  
This is Who and Whose we are.

We are a Trans people.

By the grace of the Creator,  
we are transfigured,  
living inside out, bedazzling Decatur and the ATL.

With the help of Jesus the Christ,  
we are transcendent,  
rising above whatever befalls us,  
shining as we answer the call to see and hear, to serve and be.

Thanks be to the Holy Spirit,  
we are transformed "by the renewing of our minds"  
to become channels for God's justice, mercy and hope.

At the core of justice is mercy.

At the center of mercy is divine love, a passionate love from within, for all,  
com-compassion, com-unity, com-union.

On the horizon is our hope, a hope for a better world, a better me and you, a better way,  
so close we can see it, right there, within our collective reach,  
a hope over there, across, beyond, through, o'er yonder,  
ready for us to live into and make real on earth as it is in heaven.

***We Believe; Help Our Unbelief***

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*