

Last Epiphany C'19 (Transfiguration)
3 March 2019
Luke 9.28-43
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
North Little Rock, Arkansas
The Rev. Carey Stone

Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God and worship him upon his holy hill: *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

From those first words heard by Jesus' first followers, "Follow me" the evidence was mounting that Jesus was more than he appeared. Who was this man that took everyday words and made them come alive, with ordinary objects like seeds, weeds, and sheep his stories pointed to something more than the sum of their parts. During the eight weeks of the season of Epiphany we have journeyed alongside Jesus' first disciples and we have heard about Jesus taking 30 gallons of water and turning them miraculously into wine, we have heard words come from beyond the skies declaring Jesus God's beloved Son. He goes back to his hometown and attends the synagogue service where he was the lector for the day and read the prophecy from Isaiah that said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" then tells everyone that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy which almost got him killed. We have discovered that Jesus knew where the all the fish were in the sea of Galilee that brought the disciple's nets to the breaking point. He preaches his greatest sermon that turns the entire world order upside

down where the poor become rich and the rich become poor, where the filled will become hungry and the hungry will be filled. His teachings defied the religion of his day teaching that we should love and pray for our enemies, and for all those that use and abuse us, to give to those who ask, and to treat others the way we ourselves would like to be treated. Today we are given one last episode of Epiphany for us to consider, traditionally called the Transfiguration. Another word that we don't use every day, what does it even mean? Simply put it means that something or someone changes form and becomes more fully what it truly is. Humans have always had a fascination with this and has most recently been evidenced by the movie "**Black Panther**" which is the **first superhero movie** to ever be nominated for an Oscar. It **didn't win** the Oscar for best picture but it did win one for "Best Costume Design." In keeping with movies like Superman or Wonder Woman it features what appears to be an everyday, ordinary person but when called for they transform into something so much more dazzling and powerful for the sake of the common good.

The evidence had been mounting regarding the true identity of this itinerant Jewish rabbi called Jesus and his followers were being drawn more and more to the point that they were starting to think he might just be the Messiah. The gospel for the last Sunday of Epiphany is always the same. It

involves Jesus inviting his three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, to follow him up to the top of a mountain. Mountains have always been good places for spiritual experiences and this was to prove to be the ultimate **“Mountain-top experience”** for his three most trusted disciples. Jesus the rabbi dressed in the drab flax robe of the day, suddenly transfigures and he and his robe **turns a dazzling white** and suddenly Moses and the Prophet Elijah appear and begin talking with Jesus about God’s ultimate strategy for the salvation of the world. Moses the great receiver of the law who had a mountaintop experience of his own years before stood with Jesus representing God’s early work of redemption through the law. Then appeared Elijah the greatest Hebrew prophet representing God’s clarion call to turn from living a life independence from God to a life of faithful trust in Yahweh. Jesus standing in between them brought the third prong of attack on unrighteousness and death by a love like no other the world had seen before or since. This love was not a love because of a love if but a love period. Love is who God is. When asked what the greatest commandments were Jesus says Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself, on these two commandments hang all of the law and the prophets.” What couldn’t be achieved solely by the law, or by the truth

telling prophets, Jesus was about to achieve by his upcoming act of obedience in Jerusalem that would fulfill both the Law and the words of the Prophets, by his death on a cross. *“Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*¹ As our presiding bishop Michael Curry says, “If it’s not about love it’s not about God.”

The disciples who witnessed this awesome manifestation of Christ’s divinity fell on their faces and Peter was so taken he didn’t want to leave, in fact he wanted to start a building project for three temples one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. We too long for those experiences on the mountain where the space between heaven and earth is a thin space. But these cannot be where we live from day to day. The ordinary continues to call for the extraordinary and like the first followers of Jesus we are called to go back down into the valley where the cries of a suffering humanity are hungering and thirsting for a touch from God. When the three disciples got back down into the village, they did not attend a banquet but instead encountered a grieving father and his demonically possessed teenage son frothing from the mouth and flopping on the floor. Jesus delivers the young man and restores him to peace and serenity. When we see God, we are

¹ John 15.13

changed and cannot remain the same. These are powerful images that have been evoked for us today and once we see something, we cannot un-see it. By seeing God, we too will be changed:

O Lord, grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.²

² *The Book of Common Prayer*, from the Collect for the Transfiguration p.146