

All Saints Episcopal Church, Steinrijk

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Curacao

Last Sunday after the Epiphany (B)

The Transfiguration

February 11, 2024

DRAFT

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

“Our Faces Are Shining”

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 9:2-9

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. 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.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 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.

Lord, since we are now being transfigured with you, may we be reflect your presence in our world. Amen.

A nice reflection is here:

<https://www.sermonsuite.com/storyshare/sanctuary-fire>

Most of my clergy friends go “incognito” on airplanes and other public places—they do not wear their collars. But this points out the problem we have as Christians, we all want to be incognito in the world. If someone recognizes us as we leave the church parking lot, we speed away, not looking back on the place that has re-transfigured us once again on a Sunday. We come here to

remind ourselves yet again that we are the transfigured ones, but when the reality of what God had done to us and for us finally becomes real to us, oftentimes we are very nervous to let anyone else know we are Christians. And as a result of our insecurity we try to stifle our God given ministries.

What all Christians have is the ability to do miracles with the help of God. Miracles are simply our way of life. But we sometimes feel overwhelmed as Christ perhaps did at times when so many were brought to him for healing

and for driving out their demons. He said he could feel the power go out from him after a healing miracle. But we too have been given the same Holy Spirit that was in Christ, so we too are able to do similar and even greater miracles than our Lord and Savior did. Yet, we come here to worship and ‘recharge’ our spiritual batteries in order to go back into the world and do Christ’s work of loving and healing.

The problem we face in doing miracles is that sometimes we fail even when we want to do a miracle so badly.

A loved one faces a dire challenge, and when our miracle-working ability seems insufficient, we become fearful that God has left us or that our miraculous powers have left us. However, God is of course behind each and every miracle that has ever occurred and that we ever have done, and to speak a perhaps trite phrase, “God knows best.” We cannot force God to do a miracle through us—grace, ‘just happens’. Yet this should not deter us in doing our next miracle. We are always to pray in the power of the Spirit. And, certainly when we are asking God

to work God's next miracle through us, we begin by praying in the power of God's Holy Spirit. Without God we are nothing. And without Christ, we are nothing. But with God and Christ working through us and in us we are everything. And we come here to reaffirm our connection with our Lord each Sunday and to re-remind ourselves of our dependence upon the Lord for everything we do, and of course to ask God's forgiveness for those things, those miracles, which we should have done but did not do. It is quite a challenge to be a

follower of Christ's way. But we each have been given infinite power through Christ. To think otherwise is to deny Christ. So, we come here each Sunday to ask God's forgiveness for our denial of Christ's power in us and to beg God for forgiveness when we try to use our infinite power in wrong ways. But still we do have The Power of Christ in us.

This certainly does not mean we will not face opposition. The opposer continues to try to thwart our work on earth. He continues to try to make us doubt our infinite power through Christ.

And the opposer of God takes our hesitation and shows it back to us and says, ‘There, there, you didn’t have Christ’s power in you anyway, did you?’ But the deceiver is trying to lure us away from our God given abilities to work Christ’ miracles in our world. And we simply have to say again and again, ‘Get behind me satan.’

Satan is terrified of our God given abilities, and satan will stop at nothing to try to turn us away from doing God’s work in the world. But we know he has already been defeated, and even his once

great power over death has been eternally ended. Death itself was defeated by our Lord on the cross--Christ who gave up everything for us to receive God's power working in us, Christ faced the cruel cross to be sure we would know how much power he has given us through the Holy Spirit. Death did not deter him. Satan was completely defeated for all time at the cross.

Where we must be careful is not to think we are God, not to think that we are the Messiah, as only God is God, and only Jesus is the Messiah. So, we temper

our miraculous abilities carefully, putting God in charge of that we do but still acting for good by God's Holy Spirit given to us from the beginning of time. The Bishop reaffirms that we have been given the Holy Spirit at confirmation; and we hear from the Priest at our baptism that we were given God's Holy Spirit. But still we continue to need reminding that we are the miracle workers of Christ on earth. We have a special calling that no others can deny. But we will also experience the doubts of others not filled with the Holy Spirit,

since satan will try to do his evil work through non-believers. But as we are re-purified and reaffirmed by taking Holy Communion each week, we are to be reminded that God did not call us into God's eternal kingdom for nothing. We have been placed here to do God's will in our lives, in our communities, in our world. And with our fellow Christian travelers we go together and we work together to defeat the evil one each and every day. But we are completely empowered to do Christ's work on our world, regardless of the doubts that the

evil one tries to put in our minds. We are Christ's precious people, the sheep of God's pasture, and the workers in God's world to bring love and justice and peace to the earth.

Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, we will be reminded that we are human, even though we are completely spiritual beings through Christ Jesus. Yet we need to hear the warning that our lives are not infinite, and that our time on earth is limited. But in whatever time we have left, let us refocus on the needs ahead of us to do Christ's work in our

world, even when we sometimes seem to face dire opposition. Christ will break down every barrier. Christ will overthrow all powers and principalities and rulers who oppose him and his work in our world. Of that we can be sure. But Christ needs our hands, our hearts, our minds, our will to turn the evil of this world back on his heels and win yet another victory for our blessed Lord.

Ash Wednesday is coming this week, and again those who come for ashes will hear, “You are dust and to dust you shall return.” Which is biblical but taken quite

out of context. It makes us think we are of little value, just dust blowing in the wind. But the truth is infinitely far from that. If anything we are worth much, much more than gold dust, actually far, far more valuable than gold dust. Each human life is worth at least \$5 million, the US Environmental Protection Agency estimates. So as a 150-pound person, in worldly terms we are worth over \$30,000 per ounce, much more than any element or substance in the universe. So, do not take the words we hear on Ash Wednesday to be a statement of our

value, as that is simply not the case. We are of course and indeed much more than whatever dust we may eventually become at our end after burial or cremation or whatever. We are the precious children of God most high, given infinite power by the Holy Spirit, nurtured by our Father who art in heaven, saved by the most precious blood of Jesus Christ spilt on the cross, and as we have had said over us at our baptisms and chrismation, we “are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own for every.” No

amount of ashes can begin to erase or reduce our value as Christ's miracle workers in the world. The world needs every one of us. We are indeed the hope of the world. Let us go out and work the miracles God has in mind for us, saving those in the world also called by Christ to work his miracles, transfigured by Christ, blessed by our Savior, and secured forever as Christ's own precious people.

Amen.

Last Sunday after the Epiphany (B)

The Transfiguration

February 11, 2024

“Our Faces Are Shining”

Mark 9:2-9

Description:

Christians are sealed by the Holy Spirit as Christ's own forever. Any statement to the contrary is simply false. Even though we are sinful and not perfect, still God's power working through us is

sufficient to work mighty miracles that even Christ could not do during his limited time on Earth. We are not to allow the Ash Wednesday words to deter us from our God given directive to work Christ miracles of love, justice, and mercy in our world.

Tags:

Ashes, Ash Wednesday, dust, infinite, power, miracle, God, Jesus, Christ, Holy Spirit, bishop, priest, sealed, baptism, confirmation, value, gold, US Environmental Protection Agency, evil,

transfiguration, hope, love, communion,
Sunday, justice, million, cremation,
burial

St. Stephen's Episcopal ProCathedral

35 S. Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18701

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany

(B)

February 15, 2015

DRAFT

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

**“Tell no one until the Son of Man has
risen from the dead”**

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 9:2-9

Lord, may we be transfigured with
you on the last day, and may we be
transformed by you today. Amen.

Maybe you have noticed the beautiful “Transfiguration Window” over there on the south wall of the church. It is a magnificent representation of our Transfiguration Gospel for today.

The Feast of the Transfiguration, the event described in today’s gospel lesson for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, is also observed on August 6 of each year, which rarely occurs on a Sunday. John Pridemore in the Church Times notes that Pope Callistus III designated this feast day as a way for the Church to celebrate the pushing back of thousands

of “infidel” Turks from Constantinople on that date in 1456, thirty-six years before Columbus discovered America. And of course those born before my lifetime and beyond may recall August 6 is also the date of the first public use of nuclear weaponry – in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1945. In that brief moment the Transfiguration feast day, that would seem to be so high and spiritual, was been more or less “redefined” in some eyes.

So how do we recover the perhaps most highly spiritual event in the lifetime

of Jesus Christ? How does his transfiguration speak to our world today that is so beset by so many rumors of and actual wars and acts of terror?

Some of us clergy who were part of the World Trade chaplaincy recovery teams at Ground Zero following 9-11 were further trained as “disaster chaplains” and have taken courses on responses to various and sundry tragic events including the potential use of weapons of mass destruction. It is not as pie-in-the-sky as one perhaps imagines. Common conversations about the

probability of a ‘dirty bomb’ abound, and perhaps every time some act of mass terrorism occurs, these discussions begin anew. And one problem is not localized: nuclear fallout spreads far and wide.

The survival plan for New York and probably other cities has three groups of disaster responders, one goes to or near the site, one goes some distance west, and one goes further north. When the first group succumbs, the second goes in, and so forth. The so-called transfiguration event of 1945 has

engendered serious plans of how to respond to terror attacks.

Fortunately, perhaps, these events have been limited, but go to a variety of train or bus stops and you might see a contingent of soldiers and/or police on guard. Yesterday, the unthinkable occurred twice in Copenhagen. Earlier it was in Paris. And before that, in London. It is a worldwide concern. And our best experts tell us our best response is that if we see something we should say something.

As I stepped off a subway train a few weeks ago, a person in the car right beside me began taking multiple photos of the subway stop with a very sophisticated camera. I am a part of a Public Safety committee appointed by the Manhattan Borough President, so I for sure felt obligated to make a report. In rather quick response time, soon after that when I was at that station three uniformed brimmed hat State Troopers were standing side by side downstairs by the subway trains, and two groups of three cacky dressed Army soldiers stood

around in the large vestibule where train riders congregate. The threat level definitely seems to be increasing daily.

One problem in our reading and understanding of our gospel today, we tend to take Jesus' admonition to his disciples too far: he told them to tell no one about this amazing event, but we tend to forget the rest of Jesus' command, that that secretive stance was to last only until, until, he rose from the grave, which of course happened two thousand years ago. So at this point in time, we are have no such commandment

to tell no one, and in fact Jesus furthermore even commands us to go out and tell everyone, baptizing them and teaching them all of his commandments.

We all are empowered to be Christ's evangelists in our world, in our city, in our families, and among our friends. But do we follow his commands?

The 'rule of thumb' specialists on church growth tell us is that if one of four visitors come back to church, then our church will be among those churches who are growing. So that is our goal, one of four.

But there are a variety of barriers in our thinking and behavior which are counter-productive. We tend not to introduce ourselves to others, which would be the normal way to get to know others. Introduce ourselves! Also, we may be too shy or feel it not proper to admit our faith sometimes, and even in church. This shyness or reticence does not lend to helping others find a church home. And should we venture to bring others as visitors, one of our early tasks is to introduce them to those around us and bring our guests to the coffee hour.

We need to be relationship builders here at St. Stephen's. Remember, if we can get only one of four visitors to come back we will have a growing church.

Our timidity goes even to the way we advertise our church—I have seen some of our past flyers and promotional materials that either omit listing when we hold our church services or that put the information in such small type that even the best eyes can hardly discern it. We need to be bolder in our proclamation of the gospel, in promoting our church

services, and in expressing our faith to others.

Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest in Georgia, wrote of her experience in Ireland when she and her husband attended “Reek Sunday” celebrations there at the mountain Croag Patrick where it is said St. Patrick cast out all the snakes in the land. It is traditional on Reek Sunday for everyone to climb the peak of the mountain in honor of Ireland’s patron saint to receive Holy Communion from the priests stationed there. It is a bit of a climb,

2,510 feet up, but at the top what she and her husband discovered was a Plexiglas enclosed porch with elaborately vested clergy inside broadcasting over loudspeakers and a snack bar selling chocolate bars and coffee. It was a bit of a let-down from what they had expected from this mountain top experience.

I recall not too many years ago Jan and I ascended Pike's Peak in Colorado at over 14,000 feet in a slow moving cog driven train, rising up well above the tree line. The marks in the permafrost of the original wagon wheels of a century

before were still notable, and we saw a few mountain goats and little else as we went higher and higher, until at the very top we discovered there was a huge parking lot where cars that had come up a back roadway were parked. Were we dismayed! But then I recalled years earlier as a teenager I had been in a car that had driven up the back way.

These mountain top experiences have ways of becoming less than we expected.

Several years ago, James Liggett, an Episcopal priest in Texas, noted that a public opinion company had surveyed

Americans asking several thousand whether they had ever had what they would call “a religious experience”, a personal experience of whatever sort that had brought them somehow into the presence of God. As it turned out, Episcopalians came out first of all mainline denominations, with 70 to 80 percent saying that at least one time in their life, Episcopalians had had some sort of religious experience. But Rev. Liggett noted that the result was somewhat like what the disciples heard: tell no one anything. We tend to keep

our spiritual experiences to ourselves.

Yet we know God is very real.

One person revealed to me some time ago that they had had such a religious experience, and I thought, “Wow, another Christian and regular church attender has been made.” But apparently the experience wore off quickly, as in a year or so they no longer attended church and had moved on to secular pursuits. Some spiritual seeds fall along the road or among thorns.

How can we keep our zeal for the Lord real and exciting? If we are among

the 70 or 80 percent who have had such a spiritual experience, how can we explore that to discern God's special will for our lives? And for the rest of us, St. Paul writes in our lesson today from 2 Corinthians, God "has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

How do we hear God's voice?

Let me close with a note about the Elijah story when Elijah was running away from the wrath of Jezebel, another transformational experience. Elijah

heard what is called in the Hebrew, “kole demawmaw dakaw”, a tiny calm feminine voice, a tiny quiet feminine voice. My Old Testament seminary teacher called it a "daughter of a voice." The adjectives are all feminine forms, probably emphasizing the lack of male strength we so often associate with God. Now how can the Almighty be heard in a little girl's voice? Well, just have a little girl come to you in her innocence and ask you to hug her dolly, and you will know the power of a little feminine voice. God tricks us sometimes. God

was not in the earthquake, wind, or fire. God was in the little murmur of a female child's voice. It is in the softness of our hearts that we hear the Great God. He, with all the attributes of She as well, God calls us to bend our hardened hearts to hear the message of salvation. God's young Son suffered and died after he was nailed on a roughhewn cross. Was not God's heart broken? But for us earthlings, God allowed such a thing because in our weakness and sin, God saw something good inside of us. God saw God's Spirit inside of us. And God

wanted to bring our divinity out. We cannot keep it covered up forever. Let the God within us come forward and tackle the unkindness and judgmentalism and injustice and cruelty of our world. Let us be the transformed and transfigured citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Then we will be surprised how we will glow with God's grace and mercy!

Amen.