

Title: Transfiguration: Called to Glory

Subtitle: The transformative power of listening

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/331mWv2aj9g>

Today our Church celebrates the Feast of the Transfiguration, which commemorates the glorification of Jesus as recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. The Transfiguration is a pivotal moment where Jesus's identity as the Son of God and Messiah is validated and witnessed by three of his closest apostles, Peter, James, and John.

Our Gospel from Luke describes the "*appearance of his countenance was changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.*"¹ Matthew's Gospel says, "*He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun.*"² The word for "transfigured" is *metamorphoo* (*met-am-or-fo'-o*), the same root word used to describe the change in an ugly caterpillar when it is transformed into a beautiful butterfly.

In the retelling of this event, the Apostle Peter wrote, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty,"³ which Strong's Concordance defines as: splendor, magnificence, (divine) glory, and greatness.⁴ When we behold such beauty, we cannot help but be overwhelmed and changed by it.

The moments when I have experienced glimpses of such glory have often been described as mountaintop experiences. Such as the time when the hand of Jesus touched me as a young student at Montreat College; or the first time I kissed Ellen, which was, for me, totally intoxicating. Then there were experiences of fantastic beauty, like the first time I saw Yosemite

¹ Luke 9:29

² Matthew 17:2

³ 2 Peter 1:16

⁴ Strong's Concordance, #3168

Valley; or when Ellen and I saw the Grand Canyon. For Ellen, it was so awe-inspiring that she burst into tears; Or when I saw the musical Beauty and the Beast. The parallels to my own spiritual journey were so meaningful that I still get tears in my eyes whenever I see it.

When Peter saw a glimpse of God's glory in the face of Jesus, he desperately wanted to hold onto it, protect it and make a permanent place for it.

The Reverent Marshall Jolly, an Episcopal priest in Western North Carolina, commented:

"We can relate to that, can't we? We've all have had mountaintop experiences with Jesus—a particular church or a particular church service; a place of retreat and refreshment; a treasured conversation; or maybe a favorite spot in nature—tender places where God knits our souls back together again, and we feel refreshed and more whole."⁵

Similar things are supposed to happen to some degree whenever we worship. Paul referred to this sense of inner wholeness when he wrote, **"...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."**⁶ The glory of God is a wondrous mystery revealed to us in the humanity of Jesus Christ.

When God the Father speaks from the cloud that overshadowed them, He says, **"This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him."**⁷ The majesty and mystery of this event seem too

⁵The Reverend Dr. Marshall Jolly, Sermons that Work, 2023,

⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

⁷ Luke 9:35

much to take in. But that is why we are given something practical to do before the glory of it begins to fade; namely, “Listen to Him.”

Setting the stage for spiritual listening takes effort. In her book “Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction,” Margaret Guenther says, “Setting the stage for spiritual listening is much like being a host who offers hospitality.”⁸

Whenever Ellen and I have people over, we usually use it as an opportunity to do some housecleaning, and most often, there is a great deal of clutter that needs to be cleared or dumped. But no matter how inviting we make our home environment, there are also inner preparations before we can offer ourselves as gracious hosts. Spiritual listening takes a similar effort.

Anxieties, fears, and feelings of unworthiness, along with a whole host of other things, need to be confessed and brought to the feet of Jesus before authentic listening can take place. We all face obstacles of various sorts. Sometimes just getting to church with any semblance of peace is a tall order. But this is where the need for prayer comes in.

Today’s Gospel began with Jesus taking “***Peter and John and James with him up on the mountain to pray.***”⁹ Prayer is meant to be a transformative experience that connects us with God and puts us in a place where we are ready to listen.

Prayer prepares the soil of our hearts. A few weeks ago, we read the Gospel parable about *The Sower and the Seed*. In it, Jesus explained, “...what was sown on good soil is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit.”¹⁰

⁸ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, Paraphrased, p. 1

⁹ Luke 9:28

¹⁰ Matthew 13:23

In her book, “When Strivings Cease,” Ruth Chou Simmons explains:

“Good soil is known for its nutrients, substance, and moisture-keeping qualities; it’s the stuff beneath the surface that really matters. Good soil seeks to hold on to every bit of thirst-quenching water it receives, releasing nutrients to the roots established within it. Good soil is the difference between a plant that withers and a plant that grows, and as Jesus taught, good soil is the difference between truth that transforms and truth that never takes root.”¹¹

The soil of our hearts is prepared by prayer in those who **“worship in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.”**¹² It is also made ready in those who confess their sins to the one **“who is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**¹³ This is the atmosphere of clean air we need to breathe if we are to be in the presence of Him, who is holy.

On the mount of Transfiguration,
Rev. Jolly went on to say:

“In some ways, this is what we do each week in our pattern of our worship. We come here each week, gathered in community, to meet Jesus in Scripture and Sacrament. But we can’t stay here. Just as the procession leads out of the Church at the end of the liturgy, and we are charged to ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,’ our work is to follow Jesus out there into the world, wherever he might lead.”¹⁴

¹¹ Ruth Chou Simmons, *When Strivings Cease*, Nelson Books Publishing Co., Copyright 2021, p. 10

¹² John 4:23

¹³ 1 John 1:9

¹⁴ The Rev. Dr. Marshall Jolly, *Sermons that Work*, 2023

This is where the real work of transformation begins, for we are called to be “*doers of the word and not hearers only*,”¹⁵ where others will see in us something of the glory of the Lord being revealed. Amen.

¹⁵ James 1:22