

Transfiguration of the Lord

The Reverend Canon Sandra D. Richardson

RCL: Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2 or Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9 LM: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 9; 2 Peter 1:16-19; Matthew 17:1-9

In some faith traditions, the Transfiguration accounts occur on the last Sunday of Epiphany and on August 6 as the Feast of the Transfiguration. In the Episcopal Church, the readings from Exodus and Matthew are for the last Sunday of Epiphany in Year A with Philippians 3:7-14. The Lukan account of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36) is used for August 6 along with Exodus 34:29-35 and 2 Peter 1:13-21. Since August 6 only occurs occasionally on a Sunday, the last Sunday of Epiphany allows those who attend weekday Eucharist to hear the Transfiguration themes twice in a year.

All three appointed lessons are mountaintop experiences, and the psalm reflects the might, majesty, and glory of God on high. In Exodus, Moses goes on the mountaintop for forty days and nights to receive the tablets of the commandments. Psalm 99 recounts the Lord's speaking to Moses, Aaron, and Samuel out of the pillar of cloud.

Matthew tells of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain in the company of Peter, James, and John, along with the appearance of Moses and Elijah. Jesus' transfiguration involves his face shining like the sun and his clothes turning dazzling white. A voice from the cloud says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" (v. 5). Jesus later orders his disciples: "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (v. 9).

In 2 Peter the disciples are reminded of being witnesses to Jesus' transfiguration and of his majesty and glory. They're encouraged to be attentive to the Holy Spirit speaking through them to action and to the world.

Transfiguration, transformation, and witnesses are themes of today's lessons. It often takes an unexpected occurrence—perhaps eyewitness contact that offers a new perspective—to transform a person into an advocate. In our modern times so much emphasis is placed on proof, but here we may be talking about an epiphany, an "Aha!" moment.

Share with the congregation some epiphany events in your life that changed you, opened your eyes and ears to circumstances of those different from you. Share an experience that changed your beliefs from the status quo.

Mountaintops aren't the only places from which new viewpoints can arise. Challenge your congregation to Lenten walks of justice in the areas of public transportation, a living wage, healthcare, childcare, or some other burning issue in your community. Perhaps you could do the Stations of the Cross, connecting this experience with a justice issue, offering time for reflection.

Sometimes just walking and learning can result in greater awareness, opening space for transformation and advocacy that can lead to changes in the system.

Public Transportation—If there is a bus system in your area, take the bus to work, to the grocery store,

and to church to get a sense of what it's like and how inadequate it might be. Talk with persons who work for or with you to see how many buses they take and the time involved, including dropping a child off at daycare. At the end make recommendations and work with public transportation advocates for change.

Living Wage and Food Stamps—There's been a lot of controversy about living wage proposals in some localities. Try living on that wage for a week and you'll see that it's really not a lot. Live during Lent on a grocery budget based on the amount of food stamps that a family of your size earning the minimum wage would receive or on what senior citizens in your congregation get. At the end reflect on your learning and seek ways to be more responsive to those who are dependent on food stamps.

Healthcare—Do a congregational survey among seniors and others on the cost of their prescriptions, on the adequacy of their health insurance, and how much they have to pay. See if there are persons not covered by insurance and why. Evaluate the survey results for action. What can you as a congregation do? How can you lobby the government? How can you work with healthcare advocates in your community to make a difference? Reflect again on how eye-opening, mountaintop experiences can truly change us when we return to life in the valleys.

Children's Time

Talk to the children about transformation. Share stories about moths and butterflies, and have them join in the story, since they will probably know it. Also talk about seeds becoming plants, fruit, and flowers and how the seed changes, is transfigured. Use this to segue into the Gospel and share the miraculous, astounding story. It would be interesting to have the children help to act out the Gospel. You may also want to talk about the ways our lives are transfigured, asking them how it felt when they began to read, to write, to talk, or to swim.

Musical Suggestions

Christ upon the mountain peak—EH 129, 130 O light of light—EH 133, 134 Songs of thankfulness and praise—EH 135 Jesu, Jesu—EH 602 Where cross the crowded ways of life—EH 609