

Epiphany Last Transfiguration Year A 2011

This morning marks the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. It is the Sunday in which we remember the Transfiguration of Jesus into The Christ. It is also the Sunday in which the Episcopal Church dedicates and asks us to lift up world mission.

Transfiguration in the New Testament is a Greek word meaning metamorphosis which means to change, to transform, ...literally to change form. Like a butterfly changing its shape as it moves from being folded and confined within its cocoon into something that is expanded with wings and released into the air to fly on the currents of the wind. Transfiguration is metamorphosis. Transfiguration is Christ's metamorphosis as his appearance changes right in front of his disciples. Peter, James, and John were witness to Jesus' changing form as his face began to shine like the sun and his clothes to become dazzling white.

Ian Curran in *The Christian Century* writes about how Transfiguration as we view it is both an event in the life of Christ but also a process in the life of the world. It is significant that the transfiguration takes place on a mountain because the mountain is a sacred place in ancient Jewish cosmology. It is where heaven and earth meet. It is where God and humanity meet. The heavenly light that radiates from the body of Jesus attests both to his divinity and to the transformative power of his divine presence.

What we believe is that in Jesus Christ the world and all of creation is united and being transfigured. In the letter to the Romans it talks about how we are children, and heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ and in fact we suffer with Christ so that we are also be glorified with him. It talks about how the whole of creation is undergoing this process of metamorphosis of transfiguration. Here is a bit from chapter 8. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the

will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

What this letter to the Romans indicates is that there is this mysterious thing happening to every person and to all of creation and God is behind it. And as the saying goes timing is everything. It seems to me that everything about Jesus' life and ministry appears to have God's sense and direction of timing. Jesus frequently gives instructions to his disciples about the coming of events telling them that his time has not yet come or in the case of this morning's Gospel Jesus says, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Why the secrecy is I suspect all about God's timing.

God's timing is very different from our timing and I think most importantly that at the heart of God's timing is love. But God's love is not about rushing things. God's love is not always about what we want or when we want it. God's love is often mysterious. And God's love is something that ultimately we must trust. It is in the darkest moments of not knowing that we must remember that the world is being transfigured.

One of the most profound pieces of wisdom comes from a story often called *The Caterpillar* written by Nikos Kazantzakis, in *Zorba the Greek*. Listen to this story.

"I remember one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the bark of a tree, just as a butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited awhile, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help it with my breath. In vain.

It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear, all crumpled, before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand.

That little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm."

We do not know when the time will come. We don't know as the early Christians didn't know when Jesus will come again in glory. We don't know how the world and the universe are being transformed but we are called to wait with hope and patience. We don't know when the job will manifest, we don't when the house will sell, we don't know when the economy will recover or what it will look like, we don't know when the person of our dreams or the love of our life will show up, we don't know when we might become parents, or when we will lose our loved ones, or when eventually even ourselves will die. We don't know when.

There is a lot about life for which we have no answers and no way of knowing. So we do what we can and leave to God the gaps for which we have no answers.

Today we stand on the mountain of Jesus' transfiguration. We have the Gospel's witness of the unity of heaven and earth butlest we get too comfortable Jesus is about to change our direction. From here we head down the mountain towards the wilderness, towards the journey of Lent, the journey of Holy Week, the journey into Jerusalem. And what we need to remember is that although we cannot stay on this mountain top we can carry its message hope and patience. We have good counsel from the second letter of Peter read this morning. It advises that we will "do well to be attentive to this [the transfiguration] as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts." We carry the light of Christ's Epiphany, the glory of Christ's transfiguration, and the good news that God so loved and continues to love the world that our mission is to do also. In Christ we are being transformed so that we might be light and love in this world. Amen.