

Sermon for Transfiguration, Last Epiphany C  
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Church of the Good Shepherd, Wareham  
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Today, right before we start Lent, we hear the story of the Transfiguration, when Jesus turns into a light bulb. OK, not exactly, but he shines with an extraordinary brightness.

It is truly a high point in the Gospel, a high point in every way. Peter, John, and James, are with Jesus on top of a mountain. They see him meet with august visitors—Moses and Elijah—amazing dead prophets. They see Jesus turn bright white, and they hear God speaking. That would make for a memorable day, wouldn't it?

Put this in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—a local person—let's say a Cape Verdean woman—starts getting a reputation for her teaching and ability to heal. You are drawn to her, and then she particularly asks you to be part of her team, her inner circle. One day, she takes you and two others away to Nantucket for some R and R. While you are there, up on a hill overlooking the bay, she starts emitting light out of her face and hands, like Fiona in Shrek. Her clothing is dazzling white. Two people are with her—you are sure that they are St. Francis and Mother Teresa. Wow! Cool! What will you do? Probably say something stupid, like Peter—"Gee, let's set up some tents for your guests!" Then a cloud comes and you hear a loud voice—the place shakes with the sound. And then it's over. She's alone, the cloud and sound are gone. What an amazing experience! What's it all about?

For Jesus and the disciples, this is not only a high point, but a turning point. The turning point of his ministry. All that Jesus has been doing up to now has been good and necessary—preaching, healing, recruiting disciples. And he will not stop teaching, preaching, healing—but there is a change, a purpose and direction, that there hadn't been before. Jesus is headed to Jerusalem—the center of Jewish religion—and for Luke, the beginning and the end of Jesus' story. Jesus knows that he needs to go to Jerusalem with the express purpose of dying there. That is what he was discussing with Moses and Elijah. But his death is not a tragedy, the cutting short of a fruitful ministry—it is the necessary way to an even more fruitful and eternally life-altering ministry. Hence the company of religious heroes, the turning bright white, the voice of God: "This is my Son, my beloved: listen to him."

Of course, the disciples don't get it. They are awed by the fancy special effects, they know that Jesus is one special dude, but they don't or can't understand the "going to Jerusalem to die" part. Even when Jesus tells them in no uncertain terms that that is what he is going to do, they can't take it in. They spend the rest of the Gospel story misunderstanding, messing up, denying, running away—as soon as they get down the mountain, Jesus hears from a man that the disciples couldn't even cast out a demon from the man's son! Imagine. It is only later, after the resurrection, that the light bulb goes off in a big way for the disciples. That's when they remember what happened on the mountain and are able to interpret it correctly.

The transfiguration has something to say to us today. This church is at a transition point as well. The era of Father Dave is over. Many of the good things that he was and did will continue to live on in this church—and it will take time to come to terms with the feelings of loss—sadness, maybe some anger or bewilderment. You don't just say goodbye and move on. It's a process. There's a time of disorientation. I love living in my rental house in Onset, but I was wandering around on Friday, going, "I know I had a spare set of keys for my car in the old house—where could it possibly be since the move?" and "Where is the nearest Trader Joe's?" and "Will this mechanic be as good as my old one?" The church will be moving through transition for a while. And one of the questions is not just, "How and what will Good Shepherd be without Father Dave?" but also "How and what will Good Shepherd be without Florence Berry and the other matriarchs and significant leaders that have been lost over the last several years?"

But we are also at a number of other huge and significant transition points. The Church—the Episcopal Church—the Christian Church in this country and even worldwide—is changing. Has to change. People out there don't care about church—many don't have any clue about what church is—but people do hunger for peace, community, meaning, spiritual connection, truth, God. As Church, we are being invited to go down the mountain, casting off everything that keeps us from reaching out to others and bringing the real Good News of Christ to them in whatever language or way is most effective. It is a scary time, but it is a time with more purpose and direction and necessity than ever. It's a time to clean out and cast off the baggage, so that we are free to move and do God's work.

And—last but certainly not least—the world around us is in transition in ways larger and more complex than ever. The age of Materialism, the Age of Individualism, the Age of Petroleum Products—whatever you want to call the last 50 to 100 years—its time is coming to an end. The longer we continue to make, buy, and throw out as if there is no tomorrow means that our tomorrow will require us to make drastic changes just to survive. Whether climate change is addressed now or in 20 years, whether oil runs out in 25 or 50 years, we just can't keep doing what we have been doing. Our practices have despoiled the earth, poisoned the people, oppressed the poor in this and other countries, and have left most of us full of stuff and empty of things that matter—satisfying relationships, compassion, beauty, God. The Church can be/should be a force for good, for justice, for healing, for Good News in today's world; people who love God hold the key to the future of all life on this planet.

But we are called into the unknown, into uncertainty, into confronting sadness and discomfort, grief and greed. This is not an easy path. But it is a path of joining Jesus in an even more fruitful and life-giving ministry.

We're just disciples. We're just the Peter and John and James, and most of us have probably never had the mountain-top dazzling light experience that they had. Yet, the take-home message is the same for us as for them: "This is my beloved Son: Listen to him!" We don't have to figure it all out. When we get discouraged or confused or overcome with grief, we have someone who will help us and tell us what we need to do. We just have to listen to him. Listen to Jesus, the Beloved Son.

I recall a story I read in Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul. A well-known evangelist-- I'll call him Rev. Jim—was traveling around the country in an RV with his family. He had truly felt God's call to this ministry and had had a successful run. But now he was tired, discouraged. He questioned whether he had anything more to give and thought about quitting. He was probably some depressed. When they stopped to get a meal, he stayed back at the vehicle, giving himself some time to think. "God, what should I do?" he wondered.

While he was there, a telephone starting ringing in a phone booth next to the restaurant. Jim thought it was odd, but he answered it anyway. "Hello, is that Rev. Jim?" a woman's voice on the other end said. Jim was rather stunned. "Why yes it is," he replied. "Well, thank goodness it's you! I watch your show and I know you're a man of God. I have this problem and I need to talk to you and have you pray with me about it." "Umm—OK," he said, "but how did you find me?" "Well, I just asked the operator, and she gave me this number." "But I'm traveling and we didn't tell anyone which way we were going." "All I know is, I asked her and she gave me this number. And it got you, so that worked, didn't it?" "Yes it did," he said. Then the woman went on and told him about her problem, and she counseled her and prayed with her. "Thank you so much," she said. "You know, you really have a gift. Don't you ever give up your ministry!"

And with that she rang off. Jim, dazed, went into the restaurant to join his family. "Honey, you'll never guess who called . . ." And after that he felt renewed energy, a transformation of his ministry. "This is my beloved Son—listen to him!"

We are all at a transition point, or many transition points. No matter what God has planned for us, we know that we are called to be transformed, and that the God who loves us has given Jesus to us, to be our guide and companion. "Listen to him!"

Let us pray. AMEN.