

February 7, 2016

On this the last Sunday of Epiphany we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord.....

O God,  
We open our eyes and we see Jesus,  
the months of ministry transfigured to a beam of light,  
the light of the world,  
your light.  
May your light shine upon us. ..

Please be seated

From today's Gospel from Luke, "And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white."

Even quite recent translations of Christian scripture have a habit of using words that we, well most of us anyway, do not readily understand .....words that are not used in everyday American English. I believe this makes it more difficult for any of us....even those who attend Wednesday's Bible Study ....hint hint....to be raised up and see the glory of God through our understanding of the meaning of His word.

"Transfiguration" has to be one of these words..... but when one researches it...we find a wonderful word ....Webster's' defines Transfiguration as "a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state".

I believe it is somewhat It's tempting, when thinking about the Transfiguration to talk about 'mountain top' experiences with God and

hope that we will all one day in this earthly life get to experience God in a dramatic thunder and lightning way .

Some Christians I know spend time yearning for this type of experience of God and then wonder why they end up disappointed.

We are told that dramatic encounters of God are rare both for the ordinary and extraordinary Christian. Some of us, however, do not share that point of view....I am aware of a number of us in this place who have had dramatic encounters, usually when near death or in traumatic situations.

In any event I don't think the story of the transfiguration was written to tell us we can all have a mountain top experiences of God. I believe the story lets Peter, James and John and all of us peer behind the veil to see who Jesus really is.

So let us have a peer behind the curtain ourselves.

Twenty five years ago, I worked as CEO for a very large physicians group. The physicians were associated with a Chicago hospital that was going through serious financial difficulties.... that eventually led to its closure.

I would not accept defeat...I was proud and felt that I should have the answers to allow the group to survive. I was at the end of my rope and it affected my whole life.

At probably the lowest point of my life, our Rector at the time, Father David Weaver asked me if I had ever thought of being ordained as a deacon in the Episcopal Church ?

After much research and discernment a beam of light emerged that led me to the most satisfying ministry that I could ever have imagined.

More than four years after Father David's original question.... on February 3rd 1996, together with six other candidates, I was ordained by Bishop Frank Tracy Griswold in a jam-packed St James

Cathedral. Some of you ...Karen of course .....were there to witness that wonderful event...on the coldest February day on record for Chicago.

Thus I thank God for the privilege of having served Him as a deacon for twenty years. I have learned so much and it is as if the learning is accelerating....." We open our eyes and we see Jesus, the months of ministry transfigured to a beam of light."

At Deacons school, all those years ago I recall a talk from an Orthodox priest and he was telling us about the iconostasis which is the screen that is put up in front of the altar in Orthodox churches . On certain occasions in the year, the screen is opened up for people to see through.

This only happens at certain times such as Easter week. As the priest was speaking, it made me think once again about how we, as Christians, only see rare glimpses of God.

Much of the time we are either asleep, like the disciples in today's Gospel , or we are experiencing hardships of one kind or another. We may just be distracted by the complicated process of living and raising our families, rather than seeing the glory of God on the mountain top.

What the disciples are about to see in today's Gospel story is an unveiling. It's not a changed Jesus, but Jesus how He really is.

When they catch this amazing glimpse of the Kingdom of God and of Christ, it's not the future. This is the real and now Jesus. They were seeing the glory that the Son had with the Father before the world began .

Some of you are aware that your deacon has had some health issues in recent months. I know for sure that Karen knows more about it than is reasonable for any one human being.

For my cribbage opponent.....I will try not to whine about it...but on top of everything else...last weekend "I put my back out".

We have a bath tub with air jets...so your deacon thought that to lie in the tub with the bubbles going would really help his back. Karen with some reservations, agreed. ...and oh boy the soothing water felt wonderful....I could have stayed there all week.

But then I had to get out of the tub....and that is when we hit real trouble. Even with my dear wife's help, I couldn't move.....and the slightest movement was incredibly painful.

I felt totally trapped, and then a range of emotions swept over me. Panic at being trapped; a sense of helplessness; a sense of foolishness to be in this position. A sense of fate giving me a rough deal after all the good I try to do.....in other words pride.....and total embarrassment .

Then...all of a sudden... I experienced total calm and a sense of "may your light shine upon us". At that point I made an absolute resolution to never be in this situation again, to be achieved by a lifelong change in my diet.

This was all well and good, but I was still in the bathtub.....so we had to get down to serious business . Karen called my buddy, Harry, for help....and between them they forced a doubled up inflatable mattress under me.....they turned on the motor and lo and behold it gradually raised me up...back to the mountain top..... With all reverence, and given license for changed wording, at that moment I couldn't help but think of one of my favorite hymns.

And it raised me up and it raised me up and it raised me up.....it worked by golly.

In the Gospel , what happens on the mountain is a visual representation of what Jesus says in Matthew's gospel:

'do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them'. Peter, James and John are given a revelation of who Jesus really is. We see quite clearly that Jesus is on a level with God himself. He's not just a good teacher, he is God incarnate.

So, we, together just before the contemplative and sometimes difficult season of Lent, we are given a glimpse today of who Jesus really is, resurrected, ascended, glorified; let us keep this reality in our minds as we journey towards Easter.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the opportunity to be your peoples' deacon this past twenty years. Thank you for the ongoing spiritual growth that the ministry is giving me.... I ask for good health that I may continue the ministry I love with the loving souls here at Trinity Episcopal Church.

I thank you also for all the blessings of a loving wife, a talented and caring family.....and solid, reliable friends.

Dear Lord, thank you for being there for all of us in our moments of desperation.... whether it be uncontrolled pride in our jobs.... ill-conceived ventures such as in the bathtub and all the other times when we are distracted from our true mission in life....which is serving others and in so doing, serving you .....Amen

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