

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Mr. Jim Smith  
The Feast of the Transfiguration  
August 6, 2017

Good Morning. For those of you who do not know me as well, my name is Jim Smith and in two weeks I will be heading to Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, where I will be pursuing degrees in Geography and International Relations. During my seemingly brief five years at St. Andrews, I have had the pleasure to serve on the Vestry, sing in our choir, and find meaningful worship opportunities that have shaped and strengthened my faith. As I look out on my parish family, I feel an overwhelming sense of community, the very feeling that gives me comfort sharing my thoughts, feelings, and reflections upon this set of scripture. My goal today is not to prophesize but as Peter in our Epistle today suggests instead, share thought-provoking analysis guided by the Holy Spirit as we celebrate Christ's transfiguration.

I want to first think about the miracles of God. They are wondrous and infinite; I am looking at a room full of them right now. More specifically though, we must think of the miracles of God through Christ. What first comes to mind when we begin discussing Jesus's miracles? Christ walking on water in the stormy and turbulent Sea of Galilee, his feeding of the five thousand with few loaves and fishes, raising Lazarus from the dead, his many healings, treating those afflicted with anything from blindness to leprosy, turning water into wine? All of these miracles and the countless others were all performed for the same core purposes: to make others believe in the glory of God, to strengthen the weak of faith, and to teach vital lessons and values to the crowds of all kinds watching these unbelievable feats. I can just imagine an entire village of curious observers watching a strange man, a carpenter's son from Nazareth, performing these acts, seeing the astounding truth of God for the first time. This miracle though, is different.

Widely considered by religious historians and scholars one of Christ's great miracles, the Transfiguration was not performed or made known to the same type of audience. Peter, John, and James, Jesus's most faithful and outspoken disciples, were already believers, already witnesses to the truth and power of the Lord. Why else would they have even been present? This particular mountain, Mt. Tabor in Galilee, was a treacherous climb in a rugged and inhospitable landscape. These disciples would not have journeyed over one hundred stories skyward over this craggy terrain just to pray if it weren't with the Son of Man. So, we must then look at context, the events that surround this miracle to understand why God felt these disciples needed to witness it.

We need to look no further than the previous verses in the book of Luke, the event that Luke tells us took place six days before this one: Jesus telling his disciples of his impending death and resurrection. In Luke 9:22,

*“The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”*

As one can imagine, upon hearing this the disciples must have been aghast and alarmed. Their Jesus? Their god? *Suffering, rejected, killed?* This was first time they were clearly told that the Prince of Peace was to meet his ever-so-violent end. This could have occupied days of conversation... “No Lord, you must not go, you do not deserve it. You don't have to die; your work has just begun.” But Jesus finished this dialogue with his resistant devotees with a curious foreshadowing. Luke 9:27 tells us,

*“But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”*

And Jesus, as always, was exactly right. When on the mountain, two significant figures, Moses and Elijah, came down from heaven as apparitions in dazzling white. **This** was the aforementioned Kingdom. But it made them no less objectionable to Jesus's fate, who was speaking to his

fellow prophets about that very subject-- his departure. But then, when the cloud encompassed them, they too were thrust into God's conversation.

*"This is my son, my chosen, listen to him!"*

And although these words from God the Father certainly didn't make them fonder of Jesus's fate, it made them less resistant. The miracle of the transfiguration was not to establish faith in Christ, but faith in his future, so that he could live and die for our salvation.

But what can we, two-thousand years later, take and learn from this episode? For the mortals in this encounter, specifically Peter, seeing and hearing their God in a brand-new way was a peak moment in their already-strong faiths. And how does he react to this mountaintop experience? By trying to hold onto it, trying to artificially extend his time with three of God's greatest servants ever to live. Can we blame him for this response? What would you do in the face of Moses, Elijah, and Christ himself? Instead of being continuously paralyzed with awe, as many would be, Peter spoke, made a suggestion, unafraid of being wrong. Peter saw the kingdom of God and wanted more time in it, as we all would.

This sequence of events reminds me of a semi-often occurrence in my own life. Some of my closest moments with God and God's kingdom are in my dreams, that weary, vulnerable state where we have seemingly no control. But then, just as in a frightening dream, I suddenly awake at the first sense of consciousness and excitement due to a closeness to God. Frustration replaces wonder as I realize what has happened. I may aggressively push my head into my pillow, trying once more to fall asleep, quickly attempting to reconnect and pick up my dream, my experience with God right where I left off. To my dismay this never seems to work.

The lesson we learn from these phenomena is a vital one. We mustn't try to hold on to these mountaintop experiences. Whenever we see glimpses of the kingdom of God and reach these mountaintops we must let them shape us, our actions, our faith. How was Peter different as he

journeyed down that treacherous trail? By letting our intimate encounters with God shape us, however brief or fleeting they may be, we afford ourselves the opportunity to live as servants of the Lord.

The transfiguration allowed Peter and the others an understanding of the future of Christ-- no not just his suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection, but this our worship and modelling of the values he so tried to teach. My parish family, *this* the future of Christ!