

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA
To be delivered on August 6, 2017	On the occasion of the Feast of the Transfiguration

Luke 9:28-36

Transfigured and Transformed

Just before his journey to Jerusalem and the cross began Jesus went up on the mountain top and was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. Some scholars believe that this is a misplaced resurrection appearance, but I think the timing of this event is quite important. The three disciples were selected, the same three who would be with him in the garden just before his arrest when they could not stay awake to pray with Jesus. I've always seen the transfiguration as a preview of coming attractions. Jesus has recently started speaking a lot about his crucifixion, in fact when Moses and Elijah show up their topic of discussion with him is, "about his departure." Jesus knows that it will be difficult for his disciples, especially the leadership, when he takes his leave of them, and so he gives them this vision to sustain them. It's like Jesus is saying: Things are going to be difficult, but look! This is how I end up. Glorified! Death will not hold me. You have no reason to fear.

But that's not all. Jesus isn't just telling his disciples that he will be okay. He's telling them that they will be okay too. He's also saying: Behold, this is what awaits YOU. You too will be transformed into my likeness, from glory to glory. You too have a special place waiting just for you with my Father in heaven. This is my future, and yours.

Of course, once this mystical experience is over, Jesus insists on going back down from the mountain and facing what is to come. Now, I don't know exactly what Jesus looked like when he was transfigured. Luke tells us, "the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white." And I don't know what it felt like to see Moses and Elijah appear in glory, or to hear the voice from the cloud say, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" But

I'm sure it was a life changing experience for these three disciples. Peter probably spoke for all of them when he said that he wanted to build dwellings and just stay right there on that mountain. Only Jesus knew that they could not stay where they were, comfortable on that mountain top. All of them had challenges to face, not the least of which was the cross that loomed before Jesus.

The message for us as followers of Jesus is twofold. First, we must always keep before our mind's eye the vision of Jesus in glory. The comfort that that gives us, knowing that the risen Christ is with the Father and prepares a place for us, and knowing that our future is secure with him, can sustain us through the most difficult of times. And second, life is about change. It is, as they say, life's only constant. We must not fear it. The spiritual life, in fact, is about transformation—the most dramatic change we can imagine. As St. Paul put it in First Corinthians, “For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” (1 Cor. 15:53) God is transforming us from the inside out. Like Peter, James, and John, and even Jesus, we cannot always hold onto the comfortable and the known. We must be willing to embrace those experiences by which God prepares us to bear the eternal weight of glory. We must be willing to trust that the Promised Land awaits us, even as we wander through the wilderness. God does not abandon us. Jesus promised to be with us to the end of the age, and he sent his Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us.

The transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top reminds us that Jesus already has the victory over evil and death, and that our victory is assured through him. Therefore, we should take heart and be strengthened to face life's challenges, knowing that God is working through the challenges we face in this life to prepare us for the next. We must be transformed by the grace of God into the full likeness of his beloved Son, only then can we inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Amen.