

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
February 14, 2021- Last Sunday After Epiphany- B
Preached to St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6 ; **2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9**

**“God... has shone in our hearts... the light of the knowledge of the glory of God,
in the face of Jesus Christ.” †**

Once again, as we end the season after Epiphany, we hear the story of the Transfiguration... that mystical and probably discomfiting scene on the mountaintop. We can only imagine what it might have been like, as we hear the words from Mark's gospel, 'he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white.' The Greek word he uses (*stilbein/ stilbonta*) is more like a shining glare; the blinding reflection the sun has off polished gold, silver, or brass... difficult to look at. This is augmented by the fact that a cloud encompassed them (God approached the Israelites and became present among them in the form of a cloud) ... Overwhelming and certainly confusing, as evidenced by Peter's response (to build tents and remain, to freeze this moment).

There's a distinction between *transfiguration* and *transformation*... they are not the same. Transfiguration is to be changed in outward form or appearance, while transformation is complete inward and essential change. In this scene, Jesus is not changed inwardly (for Mark's Gospel has already told us he is God's Son) but transfigured before his disciples... shown to be other than they assumed.

All of this takes place just after Jesus has told his disciples in Chapter 8 (8.31) that it is necessary for him to suffer, be rejected, and killed, only to rise again. Its important to keep this in mind, as we try to understand why he tells them on the way down after the event, not to tell anyone what they had seen. Strange... the disciples just saw a glorious, powerful event, and they can't tell anyone.

Perhaps the reason for this is that Jesus knew quite well that they, and most Jews in that region at the time, still had an incorrect notion of 'Messiah.' The prevailing belief was all about 'power and might,' and if the disciples started sharing the story of the mountaintop—of God appearing in a cloud and Moses and Elijah returning—it would encourage the popular belief that the Messiah was to rule in power, instead of suffer in humility. His disciples still had to learn what 'Messiahship' meant, and he was the only one who could teach them this... who would be able to explain about the Cross and the Resurrection to come. Once they came to understand what the Cross means for the Messiah, His willingness to give Himself for others... and once they experienced the resurrection ushering in new life and reversing of death... then, and only then, could they see that being Messiah is not about displaying God's power, but humbly sharing God's love. Only after grasping this, could they ever tell others about that mountaintop experience.

Notice also, the contrast between this scene in Mark's Gospel and the earlier Baptism scene. At Jesus' baptism (1.11), God is speaking directly to Jesus, "You are my Son, the Beloved..." and now at the transfiguration, God is speaking in the third person, "This is My Son, the Beloved, listen to him." Clearly, God is speaking to the

disciples... and us. For the disciples, this event was incomprehensible and confusing... Jesus was transfigured before them... he was shown to be someone/ something other than what they had assumed.

And so, this event made them *special witnesses* of the glory of Christ... as noted throughout their writings in the New Testament: "We have seen his glory shining before men" (John 1.14). "Our hearts shine with the knowledge of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4.6). They were Jesus' witnesses... Witnesses are people who first see, then are able to show others. And so, they were called to lead others to Jesus Christ, but only at the proper time, only when they were prepared... only when they had learned what Messiah ought to be.

Today, we too are witnesses of Jesus Christ...

What is it that we still have to learn from the prophets, and from our God about God's mission in this world? What concepts of Messiah, of God's only Son, do we need to let go of, and what features of Jesus must be transfigured before us to help us understand and embrace the truth? Like the disciples, we too have many preconceived notions and ideas about who God should be, about how God should act. May we be open to experience a 'Transfiguration' event in our own time, one that brings us change and revelation, so that we may come to realize that resurrection and new life come through the Cross and suffering. And, that it's not about great power, it's about great love! †