

All Saints Episcopal Church
Salt Lake City, Utah

March 3, 2019
The Rev. Canon Steven C. Andersen

YEAR C, EPIPHANY LAST
Exodus 34:29-35, Psalm 99, 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2, Luke 9:28-36 (37-43)

BECOMING YOU

The last Sunday of Epiphany – this last Sunday before Lent, is always the story of the transfiguration. This gospel, and the other readings, are so incredibly perfect for this day. This is the end of the season of Epiphany – the eight weeks or so in the lectionary, where we seek to understand Jesus. And once we apprehend the meaning of Jesus – and the more we understand the purpose of Jesus, then we can better understand what that means for us, and for our lives. Ahead of us lies Lent. Apprehending our call to live with God, to take our place in God's creation, we then take our Lenten inventory. If we are going to journey towards God, we need to know from where it is that we are starting.

Paired with Luke's gospel story of the Transfiguration, is of course, Moses' own transfiguration, where after an encounter with God, Moses was physically – shockingly changed. His face was literally shining, sort of like a supernatural sunburn.

So what was the point of Jesus' transfiguration? Or Moses' for that matter? Why was their countenance changed? There is nowhere in the Bible where God or Jesus, or any saint, or any prophet, ever counsels people, to seek to be physically transfigured. Jesus never, after a healing, or in a sermon or in

any teaching, or after an astounding supernatural miracle, ever then says, “Go and be transfigured.” Never. We, are never asked to go and be transfigured.

I was curious enough about this notion of transfiguration, to look it up. I thought that it meant to be changed, in some remarkable fashion. And that is not too far off. Most of the dictionary definitions say something along the lines of being transformed into something more beautiful, something more elevated. Okay – I get that. And I quite like that. But I could find no secular, linguistic notion, that transfiguration has anything to do with physical appearance.

So here is my heresy for today. There is no theological point to the physical transfiguration of Jesus. None. Nor is there any point in Moses having a supernatural sunburn, from his encounter with God. But there is a point, a simple one, in Jesus' face being changed, and in his clothing being made dazzling white. And in the stark physical changes in Moses. These crazy obvious, in your face, physical changes are signs. Maybe it is even a bit of God marketing. Finding our place, finding our very own unique place, fulfilling our own God given, manifest destiny, will change us. Drastically. These signs were given to tell us, that finding and being our own unique self in God will transform us, it will literally transfigure us. We can, and we will, evolve into a new and beautiful being. Jesus and the apostles, and many scriptures tell us about becoming these new persons in God. Jesus does not want so much for us to do good or to be good. Our old broken selves are perfectly capable of slipping in a

few good deeds here and there, and finding a few times when we don't mess things up. But Jesus does not ask us just to tidy up a bit. Jesus asks us to see, and Jesus asks us to become, the people, the really incredible people that God made it possible for us to be. The transfiguration is a simple, but effective metaphor, for just how drastically different we can be. In Second Corinthians, Paul famously says "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

So before we begin our Lenten journey, our inventory of where we are, our look in the God mirror to see what kind of people we are, let us first take a look, at just what we can be. The profound possibilities for our life in God. God has a dream, God has a hope, God has a prayer, that we can see the potential for our lives. And that we have the courage – and the passion – to head down that path. The path that leads to the fulfillment of our own God given potential, is the same path that leads to the fulfillment of God's hopes and love for the world.

I am sure that Peter, James and John had no idea what was going to unfold on the mountains this day. Likely they expected a time of prayer and meditation. A day of quiet, rest and contemplation. And that is how it started. But during this time of prayer, Jesus was spectacularly, physically changed in the transfiguration. They probably did not see that coming. To top it off, Jesus was suddenly having a conversation with Moses and Elijah! Two of the greatest figures in all of Israel's history with God, dead for centuries, were having a

conversation with Jesus! The disciples had no idea what this was about, or what to do. Neither would I. But this was a once in time kind of event. Significant, holy and sacred beyond belief. And Peter, so right – and so wrong – offers to build dwelling places for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. It is so very right, and of course appropriate, that suitable accommodations be made for the God's Messiah and the greatest of Israel's prophets. Nothing in the world could compare to the holiness of this moment. Indeed a cloud descended over the scene, and the voice of God proclaimed that Jesus was His Son.

As usual, Peter was half right, and half wrong. Moments of the divine, those times of grace and love that fill our hearts and our souls, are the best of human experience. These are glimpses of heaven. But they are only a foretaste. We are not there yet. Jesus had not peaked in any way at the transfiguration. Moses was not yet finished when he was transfigured by his encounter with God on the mountaintop. And neither are we through when we enjoy those biggest and best of moments in life.

From today's gospel event of the transfiguration, Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem. And towards the harsh demands he would face, and the sacrifices that he alone would be asked to make. But he goes with two things: First, he has found, and he is living, the life that God provided for him. And he goes with God's undeniable affirmation.

Peter – and James and John, found out what Jesus knew. That in an

earthly life, we cannot stay in the most God blessed moments of our lives. Not yet. But we go forth into those other times and travels of our lives, knowing that we are God's. That we are loved by God, and supported by God, in all of our days and in all of our experiences. And we know that our path does lead to God, and an eternity like the brief samples of heaven that we have experience.

I do not want to make your Lent any more painful than it may be, as we take an inventory of where we are, we see where we have been, and look at what kind of people that we have been at times. But Lent, and the rest of our lives, is a journey to the quite amazing, the remarkable people that we were meant to be! It is easy to be discouraged, it is easy to be disappointed, and it is even easy to be angry with ourselves, for our bad choices we have made, and that we are living lives so short of our potential. But look up, and look ahead to what we could be. Let us not spend too much time groveling. Look up – look way up. We get glimmers all the time, of what we can accomplish in the world. We can, and we will, surprise ourselves, at what we can do for God in this world. We can, and we will, surprise others, by the difference that we can make for God in this world. The only peon who will not be surprised, at the change that we can make for God in this world, is God. In Lent, in our honest Lent, we will have to face our underachievments. But feeling inadequate won't motivate us much. And the past is the past. But trust in God's vision, trust in God's aspirations for our lives. Dream the biggest of dreams for our lives; hope the biggest of hopes

for our lives. God already does. We may not get sunburned faces, or dazzling white clothes. But we most certainly can be transformed – we can be transfigured – to be incredible people of God.

