



A wedding. The birth of your first grandchild. Graduation from college and your first job. The death of a spouse. These are each transformative moments.

Moments when what might have been a regular, ordinary day becomes something new and different. A moment when what we knew is changed and our world is not quite the same anymore. And the change is sometimes good and sometimes horrifically sad.

Today, the Last Sunday of Epiphany, is also known as Transfiguration Sunday. During Epiphany we learn about how Jesus is manifest in our world. Manifest in the sense of becoming known, or as we Episcopalians are fond of saying: how Jesus is incarnate. God made man. God become flesh and blood human being so that we can connect with the source of all life and light in new and transforming ways. So that we humans can have a deep and abiding relationship with the creator and being transformed extend that relationship with all of God's creation respecting the worth and dignity of all.

During Epiphany, we began with the visit of the Magi and then the baptism of Jesus. We heard the words as the heavens parted and the dove descended: "This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." God telling us in this dramatic fashion that in Jesus we have God made flesh and walking with us in our humanness. Epiphany is a season of light in the midst of our winter when our days are too often dark, dreary and windblown. When it is a struggle for so many to stay warm. When so many struggle with SAD- seasonal affective disorder. Epiphany is a counterpoint to our outside weather. A season of light and of God being made known to us through Jesus Christ.

Epiphany ends today with a mountaintop experience. If you have ever been on top of a mountain or even a high place, you likely had a view of your surroundings that is different from the ordinary. You can see farther. The light, even, is different, as you move up from ground level pollution. This Sunday is one of the pivot points in our liturgical year.

We have walked, so far, through the birth of Jesus, his recognition by the Magi and his baptism with God's pronouncement, through the calling of his disciples and today his transfiguration.

But as we know from our own personal experience, the mountaintop is not where our lives remain. We, like Jesus and the disciples, must come down the mountain and back into our everyday lives. The mountaintop is a glorious place but it is not the only place where we are

called to live. The mountaintop experiences give us strength for the days where we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Note that we walk through the valley of death. Just as we do not stay on the mountaintop, neither do we stay in the valley. Life is ever-changing and ever challenging. Jesus, though, walks with us whether we are on the mountaintop or in the valley.

We've talked over the last several years, and some of you more recently with the book group led by Barb Easterling and John Roberts about the importance of spending some time reflecting upon and then discussing your wishes with respect to terminal illness, end of life and funeral plans. These are not easy discussions for anyone. They can be transformative, though, as you truly confront what you do and don't want at the end of your life, whenever that may be. One benefit of taking time to reflect upon and then to memorialize your values and your priorities around end of life is that you will be transformed. Not in the sense of Jesus being transfigured with clothes of dazzling white such as no one on earth could bleach them, but rather in the sense of being able to set down anxieties around the end of life. You may not even know that you are anxious but if you cannot bring yourself to reflect upon what you want, ask yourself why that might be. And whether knowing deep within yourself that Jesus is walking with us regardless of what choices we make can make a difference in the journey.

The Collect this morning pleads with God to strengthen us through our beholding by faith the light of Jesus as transfigured upon the mountaintop. To grant us grace to bear our cross- whatever that might be- such that we, too, may be changed into the likeness from glory to glory and to live confident that we, too, are beloved children of God.

Up on the mountaintop, the disciples Peter, James and John did not know what to do when they saw Jesus transfigured. They were terrified at this mysterious unexplainable event. And so they fell back upon their faith which said that Moses and Elijah would be seen before the Messiah came. Moses as the one who led the people out of Egypt and through the desert. Moses, the one who talked with God on a mountaintop and came down with what we Christians call the Ten Commandments. Moses is a father of the faith of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Elijah is a prophet much revered by all three faiths as well. No ordinary death for Elijah but rather tradition has recorded in our Scripture that Elijah would be taken up in a whirlwind. The importance of the reading today is not only that God works in mysterious ways but that leadership is passed from one generation to another. Elisha, the mentee, refuses to be left behind even as he faces the unknown. He promises to be silent before the mighty acts of God in taking Elijah up in a whirlwind. Again and again, Elisha says "I will not leave you." And when Elijah rolls up his mantle, strikes the Jordan River and it parts so that they crossed to the other side on dry land, we are reminded of Moses striking the Red Sea, the waters parting and the Israelites crossing to the other side on dry ground. God's miracles are repeated and the people reminded of their history including that God is ever present even as leadership changes. And what is Elisha's response to Elijah's question concerning a legacy after Elijah has been taken up? "Let me inherit a double share of your spirit." Remember now that being a prophet was not always an easy task. Prophets were killed and reviled and exiled depending upon the whim of the king or ruler when prophets were called to speak a few home truths! So Elisha is honoring his mentor when asking for a double portion of his spirit. Elisha, in the tradition of the Israelites is saying, I am your first born son and thus traditionally due a double portion of his father's goods upon his father's death.

Elisha is confirming to Elijah how he views his mentor and his commitment to continue to spread the word of God to the people of God.

Through the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop, through the spreading of the word of God to the people of God whether we are on the mountaintop or in the valley, we can be a light to the world. We are a new creation and our clothes are figuratively made dazzling white when we make clear that we believe in one God, the creator of all that is, seen and unseen.

Regardless of what happens in this world – and there is much to rejoice in while there is much to be sorrowful about- we can rest in quiet confidence that our God, through Jesus made manifest to us, can change our lives in ways that even we do not understand. Do not be afraid when you are on the mountaintop or when you are in the valley. God is ever present, even to the end of the age.
Amen.