

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish
Newark, DE
Feast of the Transfiguration – August 6, 2017/Year A
Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Luke 9:28-36
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God!

AMEN

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“O God, who on the holy mount revealed to chosen witnesses your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistening ...”

This is one of those “special” days in our church year, a day the usual Sunday lectionary gets bumped. Today is the **Feast of the Transfiguration**. The altar hangings and our vestments shift from the “long green season” to our “dazzling white” versions to reflect God’s holy, radiant, and radical encounters absorbed into the very being of Moses, and revealed from what was always within of Jesus. While this is a great story, our techno-virtual 21st century short-term attention spans may say “**Yeah, yeah, big whoop! So what comes next?**” A seeming not that big of a deal moment that can be recreated in a minutes with **sparks shooting from Jesus, his eyes bulging in radiance ... and zombies galore, of course!**”

While we have this capacity in our day, our human actions are not always been for the best as desired by God who creates and loves ALL of creation and created. This day of August 6 is the **Feast of the Transfiguration** in our faith journey remembrance is shared with another story, much darker in our human history. A story that in our ever changing, spin-laden world of countless information sources stands on the precipice of being forgotten by current generations.

For this day, we are called in ways that always, in God’s freedom, will offer choice. We can choose the **holy direction** of “*This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!*” Or we can choose the path that leads to **human destruction** of a “**new, amoral, and most cruel bomb.**”

We can choose to follow Jesus, or

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As I read this Gospel, I wondered what the story is really about. A few ordinary people go away with Jesus. They go to the top of the mountain, and they see the incredible, the unbelievable, and the sensational. Ordinary sleepy men who almost missed the most meaningful experience of their lives. This is the heart of the message, **just ordinary people.**

Our exposure to election campaigns has taught us how to make this A BIG DAY if Jesus had just asked. We would plan it well in advance and invite all the media sources, print, television, and internet. Before the media arrived, we would make sure we had experts there – scholars, those of the recognized intelligentsia, professors from the best universities, and educators of the highest quality and from every field.

We would invite world leaders and have gone through the **who's who** of decision makers. Face it, if heaven was going to come to earth, we would want to make sure everyone who was anyone was there to witness this BIG DAY. We would have a table with name tags since you cannot have an event like this without name tags. Of course we would then follow up with e-mail blast. We would do it up right. When Jesus was transfigured, when Moses and Elijah came to the mountain, it would make news. Every headline world-wide would carry the report. **But that is not how it was done by Jesus.**

Peter, James, and John, were fishermen. You might have heard what they say about fishermen – **“Old fishermen never die; we just smell that way.”** Anyone who has cast the line knows that fishermen are not known for their good hygiene.

Peter's name is mentioned in the Gospels more than any other name except Jesus. No one speaks as often as Peter, and no one is spoken to by Jesus as often as Peter. No disciple is as frequently rebuked as Peter, and no disciple ever rebukes Jesus except Peter. No one else confessed Christ more boldly or acknowledged His lordship more explicitly, yet no other disciple ever verbally denied Christ as forcefully or publicly as Peter did. No one is praised and blessed by Christ the way Peter was yet Peter was also the only one Christ ever addressed as Satan.

What about James and John? There were known as the Sons of Thunder. We see that side of them when they want to call down fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritans. They are the **anger brothers**. And who can forget when they recruited their mom to ask for a pre-promotion in the kingdom. Yet still, God takes the ordinary ones, just like Peter, James, and John, just like you and me, and makes us **extraordinary**.

So it was that when Jesus was raised from the dead, they were there to be met by him. When the Spirit came, they were there to receive it. When the commission was given, they were there to accept it. Even then, they did not become perfect. So not surprisingly, the sparks those first disciples were able to light have not gone out, despite the fact that we human beings have often surrounded them, done our best to drown them with our pomposity. our stupidity. our cruelty. and our self-righteous rationalizations.

Still, the darkness never overcomes the light. The light continues to shine to this very day, this very hour, on this very altar, and in your very hearts. **“This is my son, my beloved, listen to him.” “This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you and for many. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you.”** So it seems that day on the holy mountain was a new beginning after all.

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And yet, there is another side of this day, the **Feast of the Transfiguration**. There is the wholly human side of our destructive presence and power.

On August 6, 1945, an American B-29 bomber dropped the world's first deployed atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The explosion eliminated 90 percent of the city immediately killing 80,000 people, while tens of thousands more would later die of radiation exposure. Three days later, a second B-29 dropped another A-bomb on Nagasaki, killing an estimated 40,000 people. Japan's Emperor Hirohito announced his country's unconditional surrender in a radio address on August 15, citing the devastating power of "**a new, amoral, and most cruel bomb.**" The bombs were named **Little Boy and Fat Man**.

After World War II, most of Hiroshima would be rebuilt, though one destroyed section was set aside as a reminder of this day of human destruction. On this day every year, now 72 years, thousands of people gather at Peace Memorial Park to join in interfaith religious services commemorating the anniversary of the bombing, and praying this will never happen again. Yet we have opened the "Pandora box" that now many, many more human powers hold as well.

Norvene Vest has written in *Friend of the Soul*, "**Let everything you touch be treated as if it were as precious as the altar vessels. Whenever you handle anything and any person, be reverent. Be full of care with everything entrusted to you. Everything you touch or see, everyone for whom you have responsibility, is to be viewed as something created and cherished by God, and thus to be cherished by you.**"

We are called, so what will we choose? Will we choose the path of FOLLOWING Jesus, bearing his transfigured presence through our transformed and living faith? Or will we simply come to WORSHIP Jesus, and then leave unchanged and uninterested in the world we live, the self-same world God created as "*good, very good*" for ALL. **We can choose to follow Jesus, or**

AMEN