

Transfiguration Sunday
Mark 9:2-10

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Today is Transfiguration Sunday. For those who are not sure what a transfiguration is, a Transfiguration is a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state. I can say that this is an event in the life of Jesus that is difficult to understand. No matter how much I research this, it is still a story of wonderment to me.

Transfigurations in the world today are Big Business. Plastic surgeons reported a few years back that clients spent more than 16 billion dollars on tummy tucks, breast augmentations, and other life transforming procedures. There probably isn't anyone here who wouldn't like to be transfigured a little bit, a little tuck here or there, a little change in hair color, maybe a new wardrobe. And many people work hard and spend a lot of money to get a new face, a new look, a changed appearance.

Transfigurations are important to some people because they are very aware of the face they present to the world. And they will alter their face to their advantage if they can. Sometimes the change is not just in looks but in their whole image, maybe their wardrobe, maybe their personality image, maybe their names. Issur Danielovitch Densky did not like the name he was born with so he changed it to Kirk Douglas. In the same way, Frances Gumm transfigured herself and her image into Judy Garland. Marian Morrison became John Wayne.

Remember that in Holy Scriptures many people got new names to go with a new life and a new image. Abram became Abraham. Saul became Paul. Simon became Peter, "The Rock." Transfigurations are not the exception. They are the rule. We are all being altered in the appearance of our face, our countenance. We are all changing. To live is to be continually transfigured. So, who are we becoming? I don't mean to suggest that Jesus' transfiguration was a triumph of cosmetology. It wasn't. He did not have it done to himself, it was given to him. St. Luke's Gospel says that Jesus was praying when it happened.

The church calls this event the Transfiguration of Christ. Jesus was "transfigured". The figure, the image, the look that he had, the face that showed to others was changed over. Jesus had a different look.

On earth Jesus appeared as a man, a poor carpenter from Nazareth turned itinerant preacher, but at the Transfiguration, Jesus' body was transformed into the glorious radiance that he had before coming to earth.

I want you all to put yourself in the place of the disciples. You've been invited by Jesus to go up on the mountain and pray. You are having a nice conversation as you climb the mountain. You're with your best of friends. All of sudden Jesus begins to shine with bright rays of light. His clothes turn white, whiter than the most dazzling white imaginable. Not only is he transfigured into this radiant glory, but Moses and Elijah appear and begin talking to Jesus.

Just as Elijah and Moses begin to depart from the scene, Peter begins to ask Jesus if the disciples should make three tents for him and the two prophets. This has been interpreted as Peter's attempt to keep the prophets there longer. And all of a sudden, a cloud comes over them and a voice comes from the cloud and says, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

It's not unusual for some of us to get drowsy in the afternoon, so I can empathize with Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, who, though they were witnessing something awesome, still got so sleepy that they almost missed it. Luke tells us that they were weighed down with sleep and barely stayed awake to catch a glimpse

of Jesus, glowing with light and meeting with long-dead patriarchs. They were drowsy and they almost missed this glorious transformation.

Now if this happened to me and I was watching this whole transfiguration, I would be terribly afraid of what was happening. Why did Jesus turn in to this radiant being? Why did his clothes turn white and everything around him radiated with bright rays? And where did the cloud come from and the voice that came from the cloud? Peter, James and John were all fearful of what was happening.

And suddenly, almost as soon as Moses and Elijah appeared, they were gone and Jesus and his disciples were descending the mountain.

His message to his disciples was to not tell anyone what they had seen until he had risen from the dead. At this point all they could do is look at each other wondering what he had meant by "rising from the dead". And after their experience on the mountain, they often questioned each other as to what he had meant when he told them not to tell anyone until he had risen from the dead.

The Transfiguration is one of the [miracles of Jesus](#) in the Gospels and an event reported in the [New Testament](#) in [Matthew](#), Mark and Luke and the [Second Epistle of Peter](#).

This miracle is unique among others that appear in the Bible in that the miracle happens to Jesus himself. The Transfiguration is one of the five major milestones in the gospel narrative of the life of [Jesus](#), the others being [Baptism](#), [Crucifixion](#), [Resurrection](#), and [Ascension](#).

In Christian teachings, the Transfiguration is a pivotal moment, and the setting on the mountain is presented as the point where human nature meets God: the meeting place of the earthly and the eternal, with Jesus himself as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth. Moreover, Christians consider the Transfiguration to fulfill an Old Testament [prophecy](#) that Elijah would return again after his ascension

Now, I have never walked up on a mountain. Oh, I have vacationed in Washington and driven up to get a better look at Mount Ranier, but as for climbing or walking up a mountain, even as a young person, I never had the desire. When we were there, I did notice that the atmosphere was different. The air was thinner, the trees were bigger, it was definitely cooler, and the roads getting there were steeper and narrower and I felt like anytime I could be rolling down into one of those ravines. The valley was far below and my wish at the time I was up there was that I could get safely back to the valley.

It's interesting to me that so many of the really important events in the Bible happen on Mountains. God was in Heaven and mountains were a way to get close to the heavens. Between the breathtaking views and the important revelations, mountains became symbols of being close to God. Mountains became a place to experience God, and they still are.

When we consider how important mountains were in the stories of the Bible, we remember that Mt. Sinai was the mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments. Mt. Ararat is the mountain mentioned in Genesis where Noah's ark landed and Noah saw the rainbow of God's promise.

Mt. Olivet is most commonly known as the Mount of Olives. It is one of the key places mentioned in the New Testament and it was the foot of this mountain that held the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ prayed before his crucifixion. It was also this mountain that saw his last days on Earth. He ascended into Heaven from the Mount of Olives. And Tradition claimed Mt. Tabor as the Mount of Transfiguration

Now I don't know if any of you feel like you've been up to the mountain. I don't know if you feel like you have touched the hand of God at some point in your life. I have no idea where most of you are in your journey in fellowship with Christ, but I do want to

tell you that no matter how close you think you are up the mountain, don't forget the valley. That's where Jesus nurtures us and feeds us and helps us grow strong in spirit. That's where we are really the closest to Christ. So, when you're on the Mountaintop don't forget the valley below, don't forget the savior who is leading you always.

While we are on that mountain, we can't forget the valley. We can't forget where the Lord has delivered us from. We would all like to stay on the mountain. We all want to be there all the time but we can't. We want to stay there because we feel so close to the master. We like it on the mountain because we feel closer to Jesus. But friends, let me tell you something. Jesus is there in the valley too. Jesus is with you in the valley of pain. Jesus is with you in the valley of suffering, and Jesus is with you in the valley of fear. If you have been on the mountain with Jesus rest assured, he is with you in the valleys. He is always with you no matter what is going on in your life, the good and the bad. Jesus is there. We can't forget where we come from, and there will be times we can't see where we are going so, we just need to rest assured that in the present, in the here and now, that Jesus is leading us to another mountaintop.

This month we celebrate Black History Month. The day before Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, he was to march with the sanitation workers. As he was speaking to a large crowd, he told them that he didn't know what would happen now. In his speech, he said, "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so, I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!"

And so, his speech ended, and the next day, so did his life. He was only 39 when an assassin snuffed out his life. What an interesting end to a speech to be given the day before he died. He had been to the mountaintop and he had seen the Promised Land.

All of us need the vision of the mountaintop. All of us need transfiguration experiences, where our entire perspective is changed, the fog is gone, and we see more clearly.

Maybe our mountaintop experience has been marrying the love of our life or the miracle of the birth of our first child or grandchild. Maybe it's the success of a job well done or receiving wonderful family news.

If we stop and reflect upon our lives, the valleys beckon us to come down and live our lives as servants with other people—just as Jesus did with Peter, James and John.

Jesus and his disciples descended to the valleys of life to serve and give of themselves. The mountaintop had prepared them all for loving service of others.

May our mountaintop experiences help us to see Jesus more clearly; in order to follow His holy will in service of others. Amen.