

Sunday, February 11, 2018
Transfiguration Sunday

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

"This is Us"

The Tipping Point

Mark 9:2-9

INTRODUCTION:

Shortly after Jesus ascended, his disciple Peter became friendly with a man named Mark. Over the years, Mark accurately preserved Peter's eyewitness stories about the life and times of Jesus and eventually he shaped them into the crisp Gospel we read from today.

In this morning's reading Mark records the story of when Jesus, Peter and two other disciples were present to an astounding miracle. The glory of God so inhabited Jesus that he seemed to glow with an unearthly light. Then, they hear an echo of God's voice that you may remember from Jesus baptism. "This is my son, my chosen one."

We call this curious event "The Transfiguration." The Greek word for it is "metamorphosis" meaning to completely change form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state. It's a momentary transformation from human to divine form.

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**SCRIPTURE:**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

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If you are a liturgical church geek like me, then you probably know that this is the last Sunday of the Season of Epiphany. I hope you were here last month on Epiphany Sunday when the Magi visited us and we each received our “Star-word” for the year; a randomly selected word printed on a star card. (Mine is “renewal”) If you remember, we celebrated that Sunday with great JOY because the Light of the World had come to invite us to carry that light in our world. Epiphany, you remember, means to “show forth” - to “shine on”. And I don’t think it is mere coincidence that we began Epiphany with the theme of light and now the season finale explodes with epic light, high atop a mountain to witness the ultimate ‘peak experience’. But you have to know that there is only one way to go from a mountaintop moment...

Let us pray. God, we come to the mountaintop to be wrapped up in your presence. There is comfort in beholding your radiant holiness. Yet, like Peter, we don't quite know what to do here. As we begin our descent into the shadows of lent, fortify us with memories of Your faithfulness in the past and fill us with hope for what lies ahead as we listen to You. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Here we are on the threshold of seasons again and it’s fascinating to me that this mystical, mountaintop encounter falls smack dab in the middle of Mark’s Gospel and serves as a tipping point in the unfolding of Jesus’ story. From this point on, Jesus will turn his face toward Jerusalem and we will follow his descent to the cross. Mark’s narrative has been steadily climbing from the very first word. For 8 chapters, story after story vividly portrays Jesus as a healer and liberator; a profound teacher and insightful prophet; he has been called “the Holy One of God” by demons, “the Messiah” by Peter, and *twice*, a voice emanates from a thick cloud proclaiming him “beloved Son of God”- *twice!* Clearly, for Mark, this man Jesus was decisively God in flesh appearing. Mark’s story of Jesus has steadily ramped up to this dramatic, mystical peak. Also, I think it is a brilliant literary device that we actually find ourselves located on a high mountain witnessing this peak experience. At the center of Mark’s Gospel we arrive at a summit. The divinity of Jesus could not be clearer. We will need to hold this moment close and remember this mystical wonder as we prepare to descend from this high and holy place with Jesus, because from here we will witness the unimaginable as Jesus heads straight into the valley of the shadow of the cross. This “X-files” like moment is the tipping point of the Gospel. It’s a foreshadowing of the glory that is to come. But glory only comes on the far side of Lenten dust and ashes, betrayal and sorrow. We will walk with Jesus through the horror of injustice and bear witness to his

suffering. For our sake, he will walk willingly into the dark shadow of death so that we might know that even death is vanquished in the presence of God's radiance. But, only through the descent into darkness can new life emerge from the tomb. If we are to fully enter into the season of Lent, we will want to remember this view from the mountaintop. Holding this memory of the Cosmic Christ, glowing with a holy light from within, will strengthen our resolve to follow him. On the mountaintop we see clearly that this is no ordinary human. This is God's beloved Son!

Standing in the presence of Divinity is both terrifying and liberating. In the rarified air of this peak experience, we surrender completely. It becomes the tipping point moment of our lives and we too are transfigured into light. Surrendering to the divinity of Jesus liberates our own indwelling light, a light that pierces through the murky darkness of an uncertain future and reassures us we do not walk alone. From this mountain top we clearly see a bright future.

As a congregation, seeking to follow in the Way of Jesus, we too are at a tipping point. We too continue along our journey, not knowing how our future together will unfold from here. So on this one-hundred and ninety- first annual meeting Sunday, as our year tips into what's next, I'd like to shine a light on the past year so that we might see the way God's holy light has been manifested among us.

It's clear to me that you have evolved as a Body of Christ, even in the uncertainty of transition. Last year, many of you participated in several special dinner events to remember your past, dream of your future and discern God's call. Hundreds of you fed the transition team with the desires of your heart and together you informed a dense and meaningful church profile that was distilled into a vision statement that was focused down further with 3 distinct priorities. This historic document will serve as a prized map to guide you forward and will become the means by which to evaluate your progress.

We also evolved spiritually. Record-breaking numbers participated in our small groups. A year ago, during Lent, we grew in our understanding of forgiveness and then this past Advent, discovered ways to rekindle our hope. The summer found us exploring a full spectrum of spiritual practices that enhanced our ability to listen to the Spirit and perceive God's presence among us.

Dozens of you eagerly volunteered your time to the children's church program, insuring that our Baptismal promise was maintained. The 5th and 6th

grade, Voyagers group continued, as did the 7th and 8th grade seekers group. Our Sunday night high school youth group and Wednesday night Discussion Group continued to thrive in numbers and vitality. 41 students adventured to Navajo Nation to find dignity in difference as we worked side by side with Native Americans.

The Antique Show was packed this past fall, raising nearly 16 thousand dollars that we merrily gave away to needy mission projects we support. On top of maintaining a vast portfolio of mission giving, we also bought a shiny new industrial convection oven for Open Table's shiny new facility in Maynard and also, when the roof of a grade school in Zimbabwe collapsed, we financed the reconstruction.

Even in the uncertainty of transition, TriCon Church kept shining forth the light of Christ. The Caring Connection kept on caring, the Filipov forum(ed) once again for peace and justice, our fellowship committee hosted 8 wildly popular meals and all church events, we gladly received 6 new members and 1 more will stand with us today. This past spring, a dozen women retreated at the Edwards house in Framingham and the Men's Anchor Group found retreat in the White Mountains. The Board of Deacons kept our worship orderly, creative and relevant. And we opened our doors, giving meeting space to a wide variety of non-prophet and civic organizations.

I could go on, but it would take all day! The point is that when we look back and remember, this community of faith has nothing to fear. The indwelling glory of God is lighting up this place and you are now uniquely positioned to set sail into the vision that God has called you to.

As only Yogi Berra could say, "You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there." You are being very careful to move forward on this journey of faith with integrity, honesty, commitment and depth, and by God's grace, you **will** get there. At this tipping point, after one-hundred and ninety two years, the story of TriCon Church continues to be boldly written, so take heart, hold fast to the Good News of the Gospel and let the winds of the Holy Spirit fully inflate your sails. Trust fiercely in the stories that have come before. Celebrate what God has done and is doing even now. When we look back and remember with awe, those dazzling mountaintop moments when we encountered the Divine Presence, not only will we endure the dark valleys of Lent, but we too will be transformed and transfigured by the indwelling of God's radiant glory so that we too might vanquish every shadow for the glory of our God. Amen.