



*Living Memorials ~ A Sermon for Transfiguration Sunday*

*Matthew 17:1-9*

*Transfiguration Sunday, Sunday, February 23rd, 2020*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

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Text: But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” (v. 7)

What do you make of the transfiguration? What would you tell someone if they asked, “What is Transfiguration Sunday all about?”

In a bible study last week I said that the transfiguration is a mystical experience moment in time and space that defies explanation.

Now, please do not deny or pooh-pooh the idea of the mystical. There are mystical experiences every day, though we do not speak of them. These mystical experiences are holy places where the temporal and the eternal touch for a moment, sometimes for no more than the blink of an eye. They are places made holy, made sacred, often by prayer and suffering, tears of joy and pain. A thin place, as the Celtic say. Auschwitz is such a place, many say. Yet, they can also be ordinary places.

Frederick Buechner once wrote that “the mystery beyond us, the mystery among us and the mystery within us are all the same mystery.” (Wishful Thinking, New York, Harper & Row, c. 1973, p. 73)

In our lesson Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. On a very ordinary day he took three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, with him to a mountaintop.

In the bible mountaintops are where theophanies or divine encounters occur.

While there Jesus is transfigured, literally he underwent a metamorphosis.

Biblically and theologically a metamorphosis has to do with God’s transforming purposes, not human efforts or wishful thinking about making changes in one’s life.

Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet appeared with Jesus in the midst of a radiant glow. In response to this manifestation of the holy Peter wished to memorialize the event by constructing three dwellings, booths, monuments, to mark the moment. He wanted to preserve the memory; memorialize it, if you will.

Memory can be and is a profound dimension of passing the faith from one generation to the next, but despite our best intentions, memories can also become mementos that turn the Holy into a convenient commodity.

In response to Peter the Voice that spoke at Jesus' baptism spoke once again;

“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him”. (v. 5)

When Peter, James, and John heard the voice they fell on their face.

Don't be afraid, Jesus said.

The voice from the cloud wasn't a word of chastisement, but one of encouragement.

You see God doesn't want us to build memorials; God wants us to be memorials, living memorials reflecting the light of Christ in our daily lives.

Our lesson challenges us to be attentive enough to God's leading that we become willing to pick up the cross and do what God empowers us to do. As William Barclay once wrote in his spiritual autobiography,

“When I see Jesus feeding the hungry, comforting the sorrowing, befriending men and women with whom no one else would have anything to do, I can say: ‘This is God.’” (*Barclay, William. A Spiritual Autobiography. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, 56, 114.*)

It is also our call, our purpose. To God be the glory. Amen.