

## Turning Points & Transfigurations.

**W**e've just heard the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. It's one of the most important stories in the life of the Christian church. And we know this for a couple of reasons. First of all, this story appears in three of the four Gospels – in Matthew, Mark, and Luke – which tells us that the authors of those Gospels thought it was an important enough of a story to include in their manuscripts. Add to this, the fact that we read the story of the transfiguration twice each year, which tells us that we still take it very seriously. Why that is the case, hopefully, will become clear.

In a nutshell, this is the story of the transfiguration. One day, Jesus goes to the top of a nearby mountain to pray. He's taken with him three of his disciples: Peter, James, and John. (Something which Matthew and Mark omit from their accounts, but which Luke includes in his, is the fact that while Jesus was praying, the disciples were having a very hard time staying awake.) Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, Jesus undergoes a physical transformation; his face and clothing begin to shine. And then, Moses and Elijah appear in their midst, and they begin talking with Jesus. Finally, a cloud covers the mountaintop, and from the cloud the voice of God can be heard: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Even though we could argue about the various elements of the story, one thing is clear: the transfiguration was a turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus. Because, from that point onward, Jesus knew that the path he had chosen was going to lead him to Jerusalem, where there would undoubtedly be confrontations with the religious and civil authorities, that could possibly lead to his death.

We might all wish, at some point in our own spiritual journeys, to have a similar mountaintop experience, or to hear a voice coming from the clouds, that would show us the path we are to take. I have never had such an experience, and I suspect neither have most of you. But something we all do have in common with Jesus are the turning points in our lives. They are probably much less dramatic than the one Jesus had, but we need to know how to recognize them. And the Gospels tells us how we can know when we've come to a turning point. And their advice is this: Listen to Jesus, and look for the transfiguration in the ordinary events of our lives.

For example:

- Listen to Jesus in the parent who decides to turn off the evening television, or set aside the newspaper, and instead spends time with their child. That's a turning point in that parent's life. And there we see a transfiguration taking place in their life.

- Likewise, consider the child whose parent is willing to spend a good portion of their evening helping them with their homework, or listening to their concerns, or reading with them. That child has encountered a turning point. That child is being transfigured.
- Listen to Jesus in the police officer who, in the normal and routine course of their duties, makes the choice to risk life or health to protect the life of another. That's a turning point in that officer's life. And that's where we see a transfiguration is taking place.
- Likewise the man or woman, whose life and security are preserved by a stranger in a uniform, has encountered a turning point in their life. That person is being transfigured.
- Listen to Jesus in the family that makes the decision to give up something they want, so that another family – and a family of strangers no less – can have something they need. That's a turning point for that family. And there we see a transfiguration taking place.
- Likewise the family that finally has what they need, because another family was willing to give up something which they wanted, has encountered a turning point in their life. That family is being transfigured.

I mentioned earlier that three gospels mention the transfiguration. Those same gospels precede the story of the transfiguration with an account of Jesus predicting his suffering and death, and then encouraging his disciples to take up their own cross. And then, those same three gospels end their account of the transfiguration with the voice of God, heard to come from a cloud, saying “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

The point is, as I said before, the transfiguration was the turning point in Jesus' life, and it can be the turning point in our life. For, whenever we encounter someone whose need we can meet, we've encountered a turning point. And whenever we meet that need, giving selflessly and sacrificially, we've experienced a transfiguration in our life, and God is “well pleased.”

And whenever someone has reached out to us, and given to us, selflessly and sacrificially, we have also reached a turning point in our lives. For at that moment, we are given the opportunity to “go and do likewise.” And when we choose to do just that, God is “well pleased.”

Matthew tells us that, as they were coming down that mountain, Jesus told the three disciples to say nothing about what they had experienced until they had seen him raised from the dead. I think he did so because Jesus knew that, until the disciples had witnessed the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and experienced the benefits of that sacrificial gift, they wouldn't be able to speak with any authority or understanding about what they had experienced

on that mountain. In other words, they had to go through a lot more before they would be able to recognize the turning points and transfigurations that were going on around them.

When we give, we are changed. And when we receive, we are changed. That's the transfiguration taking place in our lives, and in the lives of the people around us. And every day we have the opportunity to see, and maybe even take part in, the lives of men and women and children who are being transfigured. That is, if we listen to Jesus, and see the light of God in the turning points in our lives.

Listen to Jesus, and look for the turning points, and maybe you'll get to see the transfiguration taking place this very day.