

Jesus transforms lives

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Transfiguration – Mark 9.2-9

Sometimes at the end of a very cloudy day, just when you think you're headed from one depth of shadow into the even deeper shadow of night, the sun appears under the clouds just before it sets. Suddenly its glorious, golden light transfigures everything; forest treetops shake off their dull grey-green to reveal a sparkling copper crown that shimmers for as far as the eye can see. Old stone buildings seem to come to life. The world feels caught up into a holy moment, and you soak it up while you can, because you know it'll only last for moments.

Mark frames the moment of Jesus' transfiguration just like this. Just as the shadow of thick clouds and the deeper shadow of night can frame a glorious moment of sunset, Mark frames the transfiguration with worrying stories – shadow stories.

Three times in this Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples of his coming death and resurrection and their reactions are very disappointing. On two of those occasions, Peter, James and John are named as the disciples who just don't get it. Before today's reading, Peter rejects the thought and tries to talk some sense into Jesus,^{8.32} and after today's reading, James and John ignore what he says as they obsess about their own future eminence.^{10.35-37}

The transfiguration is a momentary glimpse of Christ's true glory, but even here, Peter, James and John just don't get it. These three are its privileged witnesses, but they're utterly unable to comprehend it. It really jars, and it's meant to. Jesus' dazzling transfiguration should transform them, and all of us, like those special sunsets do to a cloud-shadowed world. But in that moment, it doesn't; the full wonder of it

is only accessible to them – and to us – in the light of Easter. So what's going on?

A while before today's story, Jesus had said, *Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.* Now, six days later, for these three, Peter, James and John, that's just what happens. Jesus takes them up Mount Tabor, Moses and Elijah appear with him, and the disciples see that the kingdom of God *actually has come* with power. The kingdom has come in the person of Jesus.

So what do they do? Peter wants to put Jesus, Elijah and Moses in boxes. His motives are good; it's what the Jewish people had always done with sacred things; put them in a safe place so nothing can defile them.

Even though they witness the transfiguration, Peter, James and John don't have the full picture. They have no idea that the Messiah can die, far less rise again.

So Jesus tells them to keep quiet about what they've seen until after he's risen from the dead; don't tell the story until you can tell it all. You can't say who I am until you know the whole story. They wander on, wondering what it can mean; this rising from the dead business. And yet there's this memory of an incredible vision that they'd never shake off; a vision of life beyond our 'natural' one. A glimpse of something more that they don't seem ready to understand yet.

We're in a similar spot to the disciples. Every now and then, we can also have a profound encounter with Jesus; feel as if we get who he *really* is. But like his first disciples we're on the learning journey with him too. Where his words about rising from the dead were a mystery for them, for us, I wonder if it's the mystery that he said he's coming again, and that we will be raised from the dead with him.

What does the transfiguration say to us? Jesus'

transfiguration reveals who he really is. And just as the first disciples grew into a deeper understanding of who Jesus actually is, we travel the same road they did.

On Ash Wednesday this week, we turn with them to follow Jesus on the cruel, mysteriously providential road to Jerusalem. And as we learn more about him, we pray to learn more about what he calls from us. Sometimes, other people can see that there's more to you or me than we know ourselves. Sometimes other people are given the gift of telling us who we really are. Sometimes we are given that gift ourselves for fellow pilgrims; transfiguration moments of light at work in each other; we're like that forest set aglow at sunset.

I remember as a very new Christian I'd done something stupid, said some hurtful things, and I felt ashamed of them. When my priest asked me to help in the church, I said I didn't think I should, because I wasn't a good enough person. He didn't agree. He said those hurtful actions and nasty words weren't who I really was; that deep down, there was a more real me.

The real person was the one who could see those actions and words for what they were; the one who wanted to do better; leave old ways behind. In a way he held up a mirror to me; held it on an angle that shone transfiguring light on me.

Just as Peter, James and John were not prisoners of their bad choices and mistakes, I didn't have to be either. Jesus transformed their lives, and Jesus transforms our lives.

I pray that this is our gift to each other, and to our community. May we be compassionate, transfiguring people who reveal/reflect each other's deeper inner lives: reveal/reflect the indwelling of God in each of us; reveal/reflect to the world Christ in whom even death is transfigured into new life.

Amen