



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Transfiguration Of Jesus Christ Sunday August 4, 2013 - Trinity 10

The passage selected for the Sermon today is taken from the Gospel:

“He took Peter and John and James with Him up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and Glistening. And behold there talked with Him two men, which Were Moses and Elias, who appeared in their glory.”

St. Luke 9:28-31

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

The Transfiguration is a curious and important event in the life of Christ. He takes just 3 of the Apostles, Peter, James and John, and treks off to a lonely mountain to pray. During those prayers, Jesus is revealed to the Apostles in His glory. We call this event the revelation of the Transfiguration, rather than the transformation or the transcendence, because it isn't Jesus that changes. Instead, the Apostles are given the grace to see Jesus as He always is, and to see the glorified post Resurrection form of Moses and Elijah. Jesus does not become someone else or something else. He is, and was, always lit and glistening with the Light of His Godly nature. Moses and Elijah, though not in their glory during their time on in time on earth, ARE forever in their glory, and so the three Apostles see them as they are forever, and not as they were in time. The miraculous element of this encounter is that the quality of the Divine nature of Christ, and the glorified nature of the Saints, is revealed in a way that can be comprehended in time, and communicated to people who can receive the witness of the event “in history”.

Moses, to whom the commandments were delivered during a mountaintop encounter with the glory of God, represents the Law. It is instructive to remember that whenever he went in and communed

with the Glory of God, he returned with a glow, a glistening aura, and even had to put a mask over his face to keep from frightening the Jews in his charge. He returns now in the glory of Jesus Christ, and is completely glistening, perfected in the light that only reflected in his face during his earthly encounter with God.

Elias, or as we commonly call him, Elijah, represents the Prophets. The last time he is seen in time, in history, he is being carried off in a fiery chariot to heaven. The disposition of his body is certain. He comes from heaven to this mountaintop and is revealed in his glorified and perfected state. His presence, just like the glistening aura around Moses, is uncontestable proof that this is a godly and heavenly encounter. It further embodies Jesus as the source of love that is witnessed at every Eucharist when we say, “This is the first and great commandment, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul. The second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” In this encounter, the authority to proclaim that commandment is revealed, and is witnessed by the Father when he

proclaims from the cloud, “This is my beloved Son. Hear Him.”

The selection of James and John and Peter is also significant. Each of these three writes as direct witnesses, under their own name, in the Canon of the New Testament, to proclaim the dual nature of Jesus Christ. They are the leaders of the Apostles, they are direct eyewitnesses, and they were simple men, hard working fishermen, to whom constructing such an elaborate theological revelation would have been very unlikely. They are reliable in that they were willing to suffer persecution, and in James and Peter’s cases, even suffer death to vouch for the truth of their witness.

To us who are struggling to persevere in the faith in the twenty-first century, this witness is particularly powerful. We are re-visiting a time when the Divinity of Christ, His moral authority, and the ability for Him to make the claim that He has died for our sins and given us a new and perfect life, like the one reflected in Moses in Elijah, is under attack from every direction. From outside the Church, this truth is denied by the Muslim faith. There is no God but Allah. Jesus is a holy prophet, but one who lies about his nature, and so probably not a very reliable prophet, certainly not as reliable as Mohammed. This lie we tell each other about Islam and Christianity sharing the same book which becomes the excuse for believing there can be a common understanding and equality of religions, is exploded by this point. We are not reading the same book. They are using the historical people in our Book in a distorted way that denies their nature and character and authority and purpose.

In the relativist culture of modern times, where all things are equal, all religions equal, and we are supposed to respect the right of our fellow men to believe in something that will take them to everlasting torment in hell, with good nature and a cheerful “I respect your point of view”. These times proclaim that truth is something that can never be comprehended.

But truth can be found. The truth is Jesus is God and man, and that the Blessed Trinity is revealed to be the one, only and true God. The truth is that the only way to heaven is through Jesus Christ.

But the truth is something that can only be understood by grace, and believed by faith. We have the witness of Peter, James and John, but our belief in the factuality of their encounter, that it was historic not symbolic, depends on grace. Believing what seems impossible in the face of science and common understanding is faith. Faith is what we need in the world today, and in our personal lives every day.

God, and Truth, can be approached by reason, but the gap between what we can learn, and what we can know by faith, has to be breached by something other than science. Science approaches truth, but only faith arrives. Thank God, because where Reason fails, hope abounds. We worry about how people that have never known Christ can be saved if He is the only way to everlasting life. What about people who died before He was born, or un-baptized babies, or people who live isolated in an Amazon jungle and never met a missionary. Experience leads us to a dead end that makes our God seem capricious and heartless. It leads many, it even led me as a young man, to discard our faith because we can’t reconcile our faith in a loving God with the destruction of people who couldn’t know Christ.

But where experience and Reason fall short, revelation and faith can carry us to the truth. Neither Moses nor Elijah could have known Jesus in history, and yet they stand with Him in glory on this mountaintop. Did they have to go through Jesus to everlasting life? Absolutely. How did that happen? God knows. Actually, only God knows. But He reminds us that we should trust in Him. He can make it be, whether we ever understand or not.

Now we also know that if we do have the ability to know Christ, and deny Him, then we are going to hell. We don’t have any excuse for not having faith. Aborigines in the rain forest, babies that die before they can be baptized, people that lived before Christ was born, have hope beyond our understanding, but we only have hope because we have been given the truth, and the opportunity and grace to have faith. Knowing the truth is gift of faith. In a world where experience and knowledge lead to belief in no life after death, or no person glorified in Christ after death, we know our true end, our true purpose, the reason for being in a world that seems to be ruled by chaos and death.

The Transfiguration is a wonderful blessing for us. It is a witness to the authority of Jesus, to the truth of His life, to the future for which God has selected us. It is mysterious and mystical, and we know in our hearts by grace, that despite the imperfection of our reason and the limitation of our tools and perspective as creatures locked in time, that God has reserved a fate for us better than we can imagine, and we don’t have to understand it, we only have to believe it and thank Him.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen