



“I’m Gonna Let It Shine! Jesus”

Transfiguration Of Our Lord

Saturday & Sunday, February 22 & 23, 2020

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; Matthew 17:1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and our Lord, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Earlier this week, my friend, Pastor Sharron Blezard compared today's gospel account of the transfiguration of Jesus to a movie preview. She notes how movie trailers are crafted in such a way that they give the audience a hint of a story and the directorial vision of a film in an effort to pull us in by giving us “just enough” so that we'll return to the theater in the future.

Pastor Blezard points out that our limited human brains are not yet ready for the full production – to see the fullness of God's glory. On this side of the Kingdom of Heaven, we can only handle a little preview, but it will keep us focused for now *and* wanting more.

This mountaintop experience is a defining moment for Peter, James, and John. They have brief encounter – a preview, if you will.

[Deep movie trailer voice]

IMAGINE A WORLD...

WHERE ORDINARY FISHERMEN

CLIMBS A MOUNTAIN

WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY CARPENTER'S SON

AND FIND THEMSELVES FACE DOWN IN THE DIRT AND TERRIFIED

IN THE PRESENCE OF MOSES, ELIJAH,

AND THE COSMIC CHRIST...

The transfiguration didn't change who Jesus was, and it didn't change who Jesus is.

The Transfiguration changed the way Peter and James and John SAW and UNDERSTOOD Jesus – and it became undeniably clear to them that this “Jesus of Nazareth” was more than just another guy with some provocative things to say. As the voice from the heavens clearly stated, He's the Son of God, and he's the fulfillment of God's promises revealed through the Law and the prophets.

This glorious episode changes the way Peter and James and John understood what God was up to, and, presumably, it changed the way they viewed their work for the rest of their days.

I recently visited the mountaintop where it is believed that the transfiguration took place, and I have to tell you that, while the view was beautiful, I can't say that I witnessed the glory of the God or even got a *sneak peak* at the Kingdom of Heaven...at least not in a way much different from any other mountaintop I've visited. But I totally agree with my friend Sharron who says that we CAN experience a mountaintop Transfiguration moment in all kinds of places...if we but pay attention.

For the past 25 years or so, I've experienced and witnessed countless mountaintop and Transfiguration moments while working in outdoor ministries. I have seen many people, young and not so young, gather in community on mountaintops or in places apart from our increasingly hectic world...and many of those people have gotten a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven or they've seen Jesus in a different light in those places.

Contrary to what you might think, our goal at camp is not to create mountaintop experiences. Instead, it is to strengthen the church on earth by creating opportunities in which our campers can experience God's presence and Christ's love...so that their faith might be strengthened...so that they might share the Good News of Jesus when they leave.

Guided by our camp staff, campers are shown how to live differently than the world teaches – and we hope that our way is more closely aligned with the world Jesus describes when he talks about the Kingdom of Heaven. And it is also our hope and prayer that, once they've experienced this kind of kingdom living and practiced it a bit, they'll return to their homes and schools and congregations ready to show others how to live this way too.

I first experienced this when, at the age of twelve, I went to camp for the first time. My frame of reference for how the world works was middle school...and, if you've ever experienced middle school, you know that it can be a pretty harsh place. My middle school had a pecking order – really several – and everyone was keenly aware of their rank and position. We were also aware of just how hard it was to raise your status. In fact, in middle school, status was a zero-sum situation, so, in order to raise your own status, you had to knock someone else down...because middle school is not that different from a lot of systems. Making sure that those who were below you STAYED below you was critical to maintaining your own status, and this set up a culture that was not loving or encouraging.

I went to camp with a bit of trepidation, because I was doing this new thing on my own – without the advantage of a friend or partner going with me. I was so worried, in fact, that I asked my dad to pull off to the side of the long driveway into camp because I thought I was going to throw up.

But I have to tell you that when we walked up to Cabin 6, my counselor, Sally Edling of Schuylkill Haven, greeted me by name, and told me that she was happy to see me – and I think she meant it! And I walked through the door of my cabin and was greeted by the 7 friendly faces of the other girls in my group...and, I swear to you, within minutes, I had 7 new best friends!

I was further blown away that the boys in our group were ALSO nice. And fun. BOYS – FUN!! Can you even imagine? This was not how middle school worked.

Throughout the week, I was continually amazed at how life worked at camp. We traveled, ate, played, and swam as a group. Well, everyone else swam...I was not a swimmer. In fact, perhaps the most amazing example I had for this different way of living came on Monday afternoon, when we had to take our swim test. I was terrified of this (because I was not a swimmer), but I came from middle school, where you never admit your weaknesses. Evidently, I also had a deep faith, because I waded into the lake hoping and praying that God would bestow on me the gift of swimming when the water became too deep.

God did not, in fact, grant that prayer request.

Instead, I was scooped up by a handsome lifeguard shortly after I began struggling, and he carried me back to shore, granting a middle school girl's prayer of a different sort.

My cabin mates were on the shore of the lake calling my name...and I was certain they were ridiculing me, because that's how middle school works...but, in fact, I was about to realize that there is something even more humiliating for a twelve year-old girl than failing a swimming test.

What the girls were yelling to me was that the top of my swimsuit had fallen down – catastrophically.

In a split second, I knew that my week of camp was over. I would have to ask the camp director to call my parents to come and get me, because the humiliation of this episode was something that no one could recover from. We would have to move...preferably out of state.

But a miracle did happen that day.

I don't know if Sally Edling or the lifeguard or the camp director had anything to do with it, but no one ever mentioned the failure of my swim test – or the failure of my swimsuit. Instead, we continued to go about our week in relative peace and joy. No one was ever left out or left behind, and we didn't make fun of or belittle one another. We made decisions as a group, and we had fun singing and hiking and doing bible studies and worshipping in beautiful outdoor settings. When we had disagreements, we talked them through until we came to a workable solution.

I had never experienced anything like it – and I am absolutely convinced that that week – and seeing the Body of Christ in a new light helped me begin to figure out what God was calling me to do with my time on earth. I had been given a taste of a new way to live, I had opportunity to practice it, and it emboldened me to go back to middle school with a new perspective how I could live differently than the world was teaching me.

I wish that I could tell you that, from that day forward, I did not tolerate ridicule of others, and that I was always be an ally and a friend to those on the fringes, that I always controlled my anger and my speech, and I always spoke the truth in love...but I can't – because I failed often – and I continue to fail – to live my life in accordance with Jesus teachings.

I fail often, but not always. Sometimes I do okay, and I am convinced that this is because I have experienced the transformational power of friendship and acceptance and unconditional love and forgiveness. And for my entire adult life, I have worked to create spaces where everyone is welcomed and included...hopefully bringing about at least a taste and a preview of the Kingdom of Heaven.

So – there are two things that I am hoping you will take with you when you leave today.

1: A summer church camp experience has the potential to be a transformative and significant element of faith formation – because camp is ONE of the places where we are given space and opportunity to test our Christian wings...in an environment that will be supportive and encouraging...and hopefully a little closer to the way Jesus has taught us to live – where we practice living deeply into our relationships, and we can explore who it is that God might be calling us to be.

And 2: Transfiguration experiences don't have to happen on mountaintops. The glorious, shining face of Jesus can be seen all around us if we pay attention. Glimpses of God's glory surround us – we just need to look.

So, here's some homework...if you choose to do it...I'm not going to check your work: As we move into the season of Lent, and we turn toward Jerusalem with Jesus and the disciples, I invite you to enter into a season of noticing...of paying attention. LOOK for the in-breaking of God's Kingdom...and be aware of our daily glimpses of God's glory.

Notice how and when God is active, how the Spirit is moving, and how Jesus is shining into our dark world.

And then, write it down in your calendar or a journal, keep track of them on your phone, take photos and post them to social media (#JESUSSHINES or whatever...) do what works for you!

Most importantly, don't keep all this shining, transfiguration light to yourself. Tell others – your family, friends, folks here at Trinity (or ME! I'd love to hear from you!)...don't hide this glorious, dazzling, brilliant light...let it shine! Amen.

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