

Extreme Makeover: Transfiguration Edition: *Mark 9:2-9*

Norwalk Christian Church, February 15, 2015, Epiphany 5, Transfiguration Sunday

This is such a strange story. Jesus, up on a high mountain retreat with his three closest disciples. Jesus starts glowing. Two dead heroes of their faith, Moses and Elijah--the law-giver and the quintessential prophet--show up and start talking to Jesus. Peter, decides he should build some tents for everyone. And then, if all that weren't strange enough, a cloud shows up, and a voice comes from the cloud, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

What a strange story! A strange story, that begins rather ordinarily. "Six days later," is Mark's dramatic lead-in to this Transfiguration event. Were I telling it, I'd warn the readers... "Now, I know, a lot of weird stuff has happened with Jesus up to this point, but brace yourselves--it's about to get weirder." Or, in the very least, something like, "And you will never believe what happened next!"

But not Mark. "Six days later", that's his intro. Such an unusually specific amount of days. Just right there, six days after the last thing that happened, in the middle of their ordinary life, while on the journey from here to there, suddenly, without warning, transfiguration.

Mark says, rather nonchalantly, "And he was transfigured." As if transfiguration happens every 6th day. Six days later, in the carpool lane picking up kids from school, he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Six days later, while in line at the Maid-Rite, he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Six days later, while sitting in church, right in the middle of the sermon, he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Six days later...could've been any week, right in the midst of ordinary life --transfiguration!

Mark acts as if this sort of thing happens all the time. But you know, maybe he has a point. We don't start glowing in the middle of an ordinary week, but we know all too well how it is when the facade falls off, and suddenly we are transfigured before everyone's eyes, and everyone can see who we really are.

While walking along the street, you pass a group of people who are by all measurements much more cooler than you'd ever hope to be. And in the moment that you are pulling it off, nodding your head in a way that is meant to let them know that you, too, are one of the cool, you trip and face plant on the sidewalk.

The facade is gone, and there you are, transfigured, in all your clumsy dorkiness.

You make good grades, excel at work, over-achieve at everything, and then someone says something negative, and in an instant you are transfigured back into that kid who, no matter what you did or how good you were, never could seem please your parents.

To everyone else, friends and family, you were the perfect couple, so deeply in love. And now...now, you feel so exposed, your life transfigured before their eyes. How did you end up divorced?

You were the model of faith. People looked up to you because of your faith. But life rattled you. Grief hit harder than you ever thought it would, and you are transfigured, your soul so bare and empty, your faith barely holding on under the weight of doubt.

When Jesus' facade falls off, he glows with heavenly brightness, because that is what he really is on the inside. When the facades we wear fall away, everyone can see what we're hiding, our true self, with all its mess and insecurities. No one wants to build a tent and stay on this mountain. Instead, like Adam and Eve in the garden, we want to hide.

Of course, if we're honest, transfiguration is not not all bad for us. These are the transfiguration moments that stick with us, but they are not the only ones we experience.

Sometimes, out of nowhere, we have this burst of genius, and even we are impressed with the thoughts that flow from our minds.

Sometimes sickness comes, and we surprise ourselves by responding with courage and grace. Sometimes when we think we will break, give up underneath the pressure, we keep going and accomplish what we never thought was within us.

Sometimes our insecurities are exposed, and those closest to us see who we are on the inside...and we know they will run away from us as fast as they possibly can. But they stick around, loving us, in spite of our flaws.

So which is it? What is the real us? When our veils are pulled back, the facade dropped, are we the weak, insecure, unworthy human being? Or are we the surprisingly resilient, stronger than we expected, imperfect, but good and getting better human being?

Fans of the Harry Potter books and movies, will have encountered this word, "Transfiguration" before. It's one of the more popular courses at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. I haven't read the books, but we've been watching the movies with the kids. You may remember that scene in the first movie, *The Sorcerer's Stone*, when the students are all arriving at Hogwarts, gathering excitedly together in the Great Hall, ready to begin this new, mountain-top experience.

Hermione Granger is more eager than most. Talking to an older classmate, she says, “I do hope they start right away, there's so much to learn. I'm particularly interested in transfiguration, you know, turning something into something else, of course, it's supposed to be very difficult.”

The older classmate reassures Hermione, “You'll be starting small, just matches into needles and that sort of thing.”

Later, we get to visit the students in their Transfiguration class with Professor McGonagall. On the first day of class, she demonstrates the craft to the students by turning a desk into a pig. “Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts,” she tells them.

Throughout the Harry Potter series, we encounter transfigurations. People, turned into rats, dogs and arm chairs. Sometimes transfiguration is done as a punishment, to turn someone into a newt. Sometimes it's done to one's self in order to survive: transfiguring into a fish so you can swim an extended time under water.

Magic, used to make someone into something they are not. I can see why Hermione was so eager to learn how to do transfiguration.

Our lives, it seems, are spent trying to learn this magic, so we can transfigure ourselves into something we are not. Whether by dress and extreme makeovers, or through this thing we call the Christian life, we are always trying to hide what we are, in hopes that we can become what we are not, but wish we were.

But does the Harry Potter world get transfiguration right?

This week is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Lent, more than any other time of the year, forces us to face our inner selves. The story of Jesus' transfiguration always comes along on this Sunday, the Sunday before Lent, almost as a dramatic picture of what we wish we could do during Lent--Transfigure and become something we are not.

When Jesus is transfigured, it is different than Harry Potter transfiguration, changing a man into a rat. Jesus really didn't change into something he was not. He was transfigured into what he really was, and the Disciples' eyes were opened to see Jesus in all his true glory.

We often treat Christianity, our faith, as some magical transfiguration spell. If we pray enough and do enough good things and go to church, we can, somehow, maybe through magic, transfigure into the good person--the Christ-like person--we desire to be.

But it isn't about becoming what we are not. Christianity is about becoming who we really are. Christ, on the mountain of transfiguration, had the veil pulled down, and his divinity set him on fire. The Disciples saw him as he really was. God spoke: this is my beloved son!

And so it is with us. We are not the facade's we wear, pretending to be better than we are. But neither are we the mess we are trying to hide. All your insecurities, those are not the real you.

You, me--all of us--we are created in the image of God. Divinity is within us all, but we cover it up with all the mess of our lives. Transfiguration is about pulling off the facade, and pulling out the divinity from within.

The great poet Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote of Transfiguration in his poem, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*:

*As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying What I dó is me: for that I came.*

*I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.*

Act in God's eye what In God's eye you are.
Or, in other words, you are God's Beloved. This is who you are. Now act like it.

Christ plays in ten thousand places. Christ, in you and me. The Father's face, on your face. This is who we really are.

May our eyes be transfigured to see the truth, that the divinity that is indoors, this is who we really are. May it bust forth from within us, catching the whole world on fire with the glory of God. **Amen.**