

Sermon for the Transfiguration of Our Lord, Year C, 18.it.2007  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Erie, Pennsylvania  
10:00 a.m., Holy Eucharist, LBW Setting 2  
Exodus 34:29-35, Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36, (37-43)



Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come. ✠Amen.

**And all were astounded at the greatness of God.**

**--Luke 9:43**

To be 'transfigured' means to be seen or experienced in a completely new and unexpected way. The word 'transfiguration' thus says more about the seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing and feeling subject than it does about the person, place or thing that is transfigured. In his beautiful and moving tone poem, "Transfigured Night" (*Verklärte Nacht*), the composer, Arnold Schoenberg, attempts to express and convey in

music the feeling of a night which might have been like any other, in a place which might have been like any other, except for an experience of earthly or divine love or of beauty or of peace or of quiet insight, or perhaps all of these, which made that night of the composer's memory or even simply of his imagination transfigured to a higher plane.

The world of our visual experience has certainly been transformed this week by this winter's long overdue snow, even if our lives have been not transfigured but rather transformed into a bit of drudgery on account of the snow and the heavy layer of ice encasing it. The sad grays and browns and remaining muted greens of fall and winter have suddenly taken on a different aspect, as though changed

by an artist using found objects. Light now shines upward, and there is a an incomparable quiet over the snow-covered landscape at night, after all the grinding and scraping of our attempts to remove the snow and ice have fallen silent. Some may ignore the snow and merely grumble about it, but most, I would guess, give in to the impulse to simply behold the world transfigured.

Saint Luke uses both visual and audible imagery to express what Christians call the 'Transfiguration of our Lord.' The place, which some scholars think was Mount Hermon, may have been snow-covered. That, they reason, might have contributed to the extreme whiteness and brightness reported in the text. Jesus stands at the center of this

vision, with Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, standing to His right and left. Our Lord did not take all of His Disciples with Him, but Peter, James and John only. Why? Perhaps it was these alone who were able to see what Almighty God wanted to show them, and not only to see this 'wondrous vision,' as we sing in the old Mediæval hymn of the day, but also to hear the Father's voice from Heaven: "Behold, this is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him!"

The rest of the Disciples had been left down below. What had they been doing? We learn in today's Gospel that they had been attempting to exorcize a young boy possessed of some 'evil spirit,' one that sounds to our modern ears like the spirit of

epilepsy. To moderns or ancients alike, the symptoms of this terrible illness are truly frightful. Neither then nor now would anyone think of it as a blessing. Here was this young man, the only child of a father who loved him, but who was powerless to help his son when the grand maw seizure of the falling sickness came upon him. And here were the Disciples of Jesus, minus three, who had seen Jesus heal people in mind as well as in body, as we heard in last Sunday's Gospel. Yet, they could not heal the boy.

Jesus, with Peter, James and John—who all see Jesus, the Law and the Prophets in a completely new light—come down from their mountain into this human drama. As do many after returning from an exalted 'mountain-top experience,' Our Lord grumbles at

having to put up with people who either do not know or do not trust the power of God to heal and to save. He rebukes the spirit, it leaves the boy and Jesus gives him back to his father. "And all were astounded at the power of God." All were astounded, but Peter, James and John were not surprised. They were not among those Disciples who could not cast out the evil spirit. They knew and believed the transforming power of God. If we look ahead to Saint Luke's second volume, The Acts of the Apostles, we will see Peter, James and John working precisely such wonders among the members of the Early Church.

Does all of this mean that 'faith healing' works? I do not know the answer to that, if that is your question, but I do know that faith works and that

the deepest healing of the heart and mind cannot take place without it. Do you and I see God at work in our world, healing brokenness and overcoming division? It is hard to make that image out amid the pitch darkness of war and famine and mindless materialism. We do see what Peter, James and John saw, but only if we see the whole world and all of life transfigured by God Who has come into this world to stay, to heal us and to make us whole, and only if we hear the voice of the Father which the Church has never ceased to proclaim. ✠Amen.

✠Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins  
us by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to  
His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with  
the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever.

✠ Amen.

