

“The Divine Challenge”

Message by DD Adams
Providence United Methodist Church
Transfiguration Sunday
March 2, 2014

Today’s gospel lesson is taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 17, verses 1 through 9. I’ll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. God bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. Amen.

The transfiguration occurred somewhere on the slopes of Mt. Hermon. Luke states that Peter, James, and John were exhausted and ready to sleep after a hard climb. Could be the sun was about ready to set or it may have been completely dark. Luke tells us that Jesus was praying and seeking his Father’s presence. Jesus’

earthly life was soon coming to an end. Before too long there would be a real change in his life. Jesus knew he was headed for a cross, and I'm sure he had some questions about his death. Change always feels uncertain and scary.

In the chapter prior to this Peter made a confession that Jesus was the Son of the living God—a strong affirmation. The transfiguration or change in Jesus' appearance was also an affirmation of his identity as God's son. It was this vision of Christ being transfigured that reinforced the disciples' faith—for as they witnessed Christ's transfiguration it prepared them for their own change.

Jesus was changed right before the disciples' eyes. His clothes became dazzlingly white and his face shone like the sun. Scripture says the disciples were filled with fear hearing the voice of God. From the moment the disciples met Jesus they were changing. Changes are frightening, but their also challenges. Every day in his presence meant their thinking was turned upside down. That's what transfiguration means—it's a change on the inside that produces a change on the outside.

Change is frightening. It's unsettling and uncomfortable. We're no longer in our comfort zone. Things seem a little out of control. We wonder how we'll handle it. We'd rather just carry on as it's always been. That's easier. We ask God; couldn't we just stay in our little cocoon here at 3716 Kempton Church Road and tend to the status quo? But we're called to change as Christians—it's a divine challenge. We change on the inside, and consequently, we make changes on the outside.

We're constantly being shaped and re-shaped no matter how old we are. We're living organisms, and we're changing. And it's not just us that's undergoes change, our community and those living around us are changing too. Technology has taken off like a rocket, and it's about all we can do to grab the tail of as it flies

past us. If we're going to continue to influence our community for Christ we've got to change too. We must embrace what Christ calls us to do.

As we change the church changes in order to continue to influence and draw others to Christ. We wonder why we have to change. After all, everything we've done has worked pretty well. You know, the way we've always done it in the past? Look at the universe God created. It's continually changing. The earth's outer crust is always shifting and sliding. The plates knock together as they alter their size and direction. The sea levels change, and even the map of the world is in a constant shifting state. Everything is always fluctuating. So why should we be any different? We're part of creation too.

We're called to go into the world, in the strength of God's spirit, and to give ourselves to others. That means we get up, we move outside these walls, and we become visible to our community in a different way. That makes us feel uncomfortable. Change, it's unsettling. It's the unknown, but we're called to do it. We must do it. Our call is to look outwardly to our community, and to get out of these four walls. We're called to look outside of ourselves. To take the gospel out into the world means we get up and get out into the world and give ourselves for the world. It's a divine challenge we've got to embrace.

As we go we're changed and transfigured to become like Christ just as the disciples. We're called to influence the world for Jesus Christ. It's ourselves we find most changed as we venture out to meet others and establish relationships. Jesus said to not be afraid but to go into all the world and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We're the ones transfigured the most as we reach out and listen. We listen to God's voice, and we listen to others as relationships are cultivated. It's a divine challenge we're given to get up and get out in the world. Let's see beyond these four walls and minister to a world that's looking for change.

The transfiguration was for the disciples. It was a preview for them about the change that was taking place. They followed Christ from the beginning because they were looking for a change. So often when we're confronted with having to do things differently we don't like it. We're looking for it, but then when change happens we don't want it. It's scary. In the midst of the change, Christ says to not be afraid. Let's agree to listen and be changed. Let's allow Jesus to come and touch us and say, "Get up and do not be afraid." Let's pray. Holy God whose son is filled with glory and shines like the sun, touch and change us. Help us embrace the changes that will take place in our lives. Take the fear away as we look up to you. Lead and guide us as we listen. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.