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 Transfiguration Sunday

Transfiguration
Mark 9:2-9

*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a **high mountain apart, by themselves**. And he was **transfigured** before them,³ and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one^[b] on earth could brighten them.⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “**This is my Son, the Beloved;**^[c] **listen to him!**”⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.*

*⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, **until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead***

Have you ever had a transformative experience with God?

On our women’s retreat recently we heard so many stories about transformative spiritual experiences—
 people who felt God’s hand holding theirs in a medical crisis,
 God providing peace after the death of a loved one,
 God seeing them through the horrible grief of losing a child,
 or the sorrow of losing a parent.

We heard stories of ***seeing God literally*** in the mountains,
 or at the shore,
 or in the faces of strangers,
 or in the stillness of being alone.

I think that’s what’s behind the “***spiritual but not religious***” movement in our country.

These are the people often referred to as the “nones”.

Those who, when surveyed, say that their ***religious affiliation is NONE***.

The interesting thing is that many of those people say that ***they ARE spiritual***.

They identify as ***spiritual, but not religious***.

These are people who want an experience of God, but without the formal church.

I think that we *ALL have a deep longing for spiritual experiences, don't we?*
 We all want some mountaintop experiences in life,
 Just *like Peter wanted to stay* on that mountain with Jesus, Elijah and Moses.
 I mean talk about a *transformative* experience for those disciples—
 they were in the presence of the greatest spiritual leaders of history—
 Moses who led the people out of Egypt,
 Elijah the great prophet who defeated the prophets of Baal,
 and Jesus—their Rabbi, Teacher, and Messiah.

And in that experience, they saw *Jesus transfigured*—
 his appearance changed before their very eyes—into a dazzling bright white.
 It was a sign—that *Jesus is more than just a Rabbi, or Teacher.*
 This is the *Son of God.*
 The voice from heaven confirmed this, just as it did at Jesus' baptism,
 For the voice of God says *This is my Son, the Beloved, Listen to Him!*
 The transfiguration is transformative—for Jesus and the three disciples.
 But what if it's also transformative for us?

Karoline Lewis of workingpreacher.com says that
"WE need transfiguration as much as Jesus needed to be transfigured."
 What does she mean?
 And why would *JESUS need this?*
 It wasn't like he became a different person on that mountain.
 His *appearance* changed.
 But in that transfiguration, *a veil was lifted,*
 and the disciples see him for who he really is.
 And God's *voice confirms* it all.

This story in the Gospel is actually *a TURNING point for Jesus*—
 he has been in ministry—teaching, healing, preaching, and praying.
But after this, Jesus starts to really look toward and talk about,
 his *death and resurrection,*
 before he enters Jerusalem for the last week of his life.

Maybe this is why as they are coming down the mountain,
 Jesus *ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen,*
until AFTER the Son of Man had risen from the dead.
 This event is a turning point—his ministry has reached *a tipping point*
 with the religious authorities.
 So the Transfiguration signals *a CHANGE in Jesus' ministry.*

Jesus is different after this, his ministry is different.

And what about the disciples?

Well, the disciples, especially Peter, James and John who witnessed this, they *see* Jesus differently.

They *hear* him differently.

So what does Transfiguration have to do with US? Today?

Lewis says that WE need this story—as much as Jesus needed it to happen!

Why would WE need this story?

Well, think about it this way---

Why do we need transformative experiences at all?

What if this Transfiguration story symbolizing a turning point for us?

What if it *reminds us of our OWN mountaintop* experiences?

What if it gets us *thinking about OUR spiritual encounters* with God?

What if it opens us to the *CHANGE*—that Jesus always brings into our lives?

First ***take a moment to remember a mountaintop experience***—

when you saw the majesty and power of God.

I think of being in the Rocky Mountain National Park.

And just feeling the presence of God—God the Creator.

What about you?

Where were you?

What were you doing?

Now take a moment to think about a time that God brought change to your life.

I believe this happened in the death of someone dear to me.

Like a before and after moment of my life.

I also think about moving cross country and seeing all this for the first time.

Starting a whole new chapter.

What about you?

When has God brought something new to your life?

The hard part about a story like the Transfiguration is simple.

It reminds us how ***change is inevitable***.

Change was inevitable for Jesus, and it is inevitable for us.

Everything changes. ALL THE TIME.

The only constant in life is change! Darn it!

Of course 99.9% of people don't like change,

and we don't usually submit willingly to it.

I was listening to a sermon about transfiguration by MaryAnn McKibben Dana,
 And she mentioned a sign that she saw
 Hanging in the office of National Capital Presbytery.
 It said *when a system DOESN'T KNOW what to do, it does what it KNOWS.*
 In other words, systems—whether they be families or churches—
tend to do the same thing.
The thing they know.
 Day after day.

We do not usually embrace change.
 And when we are faced with choices—*we choose what's familiar.*
 Because it's easier—even if it's making us miserable!

Think about that in your own life.
 How do *you get stuck* in the same habits,
 day after day, month after month, year after year?

Is there something you usually eat? Or clothes you usually wear?
 What about what you order at a restaurant?
 Do you take the same route to work or school?
 I have favorite foods, favorite clothes, favorite places to go.
 And some of these have just become habits.

And what about us as a CHURCH?

Aren't there literally hundreds of things we do, over and over again?
 Some of it makes sense, like our liturgy, some of our prayers, or scripture,
 but some of it is *just habit.*
 It's just *familiar.*
 It's why people in church so often say '*we've always done it this way*',
 Even if that's not exactly true!

Right now, we are being asked as a church to *consider a new thing*—
 a merger with Lincroft Presbyterian.
 It hasn't been considered lightly,
 or without great prayer, study, and deliberation.

What if this opportunity is from God?

Like God tells us in *Isaiah 43:19*:

I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.

You know, Karoline Lewis says that ***once we really know Jesus,***
we CANNOT stay the same.
 How is that true in ***your life?***
 Are you ***different*** because of your faith in Jesus?

Has Jesus asked something of you?
 Or encouraged you to do something new or different?
 When has God led you down a new path or into a new adventure?
 When has God seen you through hard times,
 leading you into to a different future?
 Once we know Jesus,
 we really ***can't, we don't,***
and we shouldn't stay the same!

Because Jesus came to bring us NEW life, abundant life.
 Jesus didn't say he came to bring us the SAME life day after day.
 Jesus didn't say he came to bring us STAGNANT life.
 He came to bring us ***something NEW.***

What is that new thing that God is doing in your life, today?
And what is it in our church?

This month we are celebrating ***Black history,***
 And so we have the opportunity to hear stories of African Americans,
 And we learn from them, because we are ***ALL children of God.***
 We can ***learn*** so much from our differences, and our similarities.
 Isn't it a gift to learn ***new stories and be inspired in new ways?***
 This year Black History month's theme is "African Americans and the Arts".
So, next week we'll hear inspiring music, and have an inspiring speaker about the
 Black Heritage flag after worship in Fellowship Hall, with some awesome food
 from Ms. Hank McKee.
 I hope you'll join us.

I was reading some of *Martin Luther King Jr's* words,
And his *last sermon* is so meaningful---and it relates to Transfiguration.

He spoke about *going to the mountaintop*,
and how it gave him the strength to carry on.

His last sermon was delivered on April 3, 1968, on the eve of his assassination,
at Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee.

He had come to support a sanitation worker's strike,
and was asked to speak at the last minute.

He concluded with these profound words:

I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountain top. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now.

I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

We too don't know what will happen next in life,
But we do know *who will be with us*.

Martin Luther King, Jr. worked for change in this world,
For freedom and equality.

What kind of change will we work for?

And will we *allow ourselves to be changed*?

That's what happened to the disciples on that mountain, *they were changed*.

Will we open ourselves to the power of God?

Will we embrace the transformation that God offers us?

If we are serious about,

We need to do a couple of things—right now.

We need to **PAY ATTENTION!**

We have to *look around for all the God-sightings* in this world,

And in our everyday lives.
 We need to ***be aware*** of all that God is doing.
 That means having *open eyes, ears, and hearts*.

This was the lesson for Peter, James and John, and it's a lesson for us.
Jesus needed them to pay attention to understand the Transfiguration.

Jesus ***still needs us to pay attention*** to the God moments,
 The God-sightings, God-winks, whatever you call them.
 And Jesus needs us to be open to transformation!
 Jesus wants us to be ***open to the change God brings*** all of us as believers.

And there's something else Jesus asks of us.
We have to LISTEN.
 God's voice is very clear in this story—Mark says that:
Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice,
“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

We all need to ***LISTEN for the voice of God—in our lives.***
 Whoever we are, wherever we are.
 It may be in one of those mountaintop experiences, like this transfiguration story,
 But it also might be when we are sitting alone in our living room,
 Or taking the dog for a walk.
 This story reminds us to ***be still and listen.***
 In fact, God commands us to listen!

How can you listen for God's voice today? And this week?

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** for you today.
We need this transfiguration story, as much as Jesus needed to be transfigured.
God is doing a NEW thing—do we perceive it?
 In our own lives? In our church?
 May we ***pay attention*** to the God-sightings!
 May we ***listen*** for the voice of God—wherever we hear it.
 And for the gift of transformation, all God's people can say together, Amen.