

SERMON, TRANSFIGURATION 2025

“Master, it is good for us to be here.”

That’s the setup. Today, Jesus withdraws with three of his disciples to a mountain. It’s a setup. Come on, everybody from Moses on knows that mountains are places that you climb to get close to God, to experience something holy. Moses had to go up a mountain to get the Ten Commandments. He knows, we all know.

If today’s Bible reading was a movie, it would be one of those amazing “how did they do that” computer-generated scenes. It is too fantastic to be real.

On the mountain of transfiguration, the veil between present and future, the curtain separating human from divine, was lifted for a shining instant. The disciples were given a dazzling vision of who Jesus was. And just like at his baptism, there was God’s voice from heaven. Moses and Elijah, two prophets long dead, stood there among them. The appearance of Jesus was transfigured before them.

(Transfigured means changed.) There was bright blinding light. The only proper thing to do when something like this happens is just what they did, they fell on their knees and worshiped.

Peter blurted out: “Master, it is good for us to be here.”

True-er words were never spoken, Peter. If something like that has never happened to you, I hope that you wish it will happen one day. And, if something like that has happened to you, then you know what I am trying to talk about here.

We know how our petty moralistic religion pales in significance to such a glorious holy, transfigured moment. How, “Mommy, look at me” becomes “Oh my, I just saw God and lived to talk about it.”

We get our word *worship* from the old Anglo-Saxon word *worth-ship*. To worship means to see and to respond to the true worth of something, to recognize and to adore the value of something grand.

God’s holiness is beautiful to behold. Beauty has a way of reaching out to us, seizing us, demanding our adoration. We worship not just the majesty of God, but the beauty of God.

Our Bible reading today, Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain, occurs in the middle of a rather humdrum narrative of events in the life of Jesus and the disciples. Sure, there were some healings and some miracles and a

pretty good sermon or two, but nothing too spectacular considering the context.

But, ah, it was up on the mountain that the spectacular broke into the normal, the extraordinary crashed into the ordinary. And for a shining moment, the disciples see, the disciples believe, the disciples worship. “Master, it is good for us to be here.”

A mystery question for you. Are the disciples given a glimpse of the supernatural? Or is this really the natural seen rightly? Is this event on the mountain truly ordinary or is this the ordinary seen through the eyes of faith?

Maybe it would all seem like a miracle if we had the eyes to see. Maybe we wouldn't have to be slapped in the face by a beautiful sunset or a marvelous painting or an amazing symphony or some holy experience if we could see the miracles in our midst.

Take that as a definition of faith, a conviction of things not seen. Faith is the gift of being to see what's really going on beneath the surface. Do miracles still exist? If they do, why aren't we aware of them?

You know how easy it is to become accustomed to the routine, how easy it is to have your vision dulled by the reassuring ordinariness of the everyday.

What if we were aware of the presence of God all around us?

So here we are. We have come into this holy and high sanctuary of praise hoping that the veil will be pulled back, the curtain will be lifted and, for a shining moment, we will be able to see the world as it really is.

That's my theory of why people go to art museums and symphonies in the first place. We hunger for many things, but chiefly among the things for which we hunger is beauty.

A few years ago, we went to see a special show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It was called the Age of the Fresco. Yeah, I know, an esoteric subject with all these bits and pieces of frescoes from Italy. But I was stunned to see hundreds of people gathered on the steps of the Met that morning, eagerly awaiting the museum to open and ready for the doors to swing open.

And when those doors were opened, people started pushing, stampeding really, exploding into the museum. I was startled. I saw them pulling little children up the steps, running, pushing. All to see a bunch of art.

“How hungry are people for beauty,” I asked myself. I'll tell you, plenty hungry.

On the mountain, Jesus was transfigured. His garments were gleaming white and a light shone from him brighter than the light of the sun, the Bible says. His disciples, who had walked the same dusty roads with him, who had slept beneath the same stary skies with him, fell to their knees overwhelmed with wonder as they saw him in a new way.

Then, there was a voice from heaven. And they worshiped. They worshiped, because that's the only thing to do when you are so close to beauty, so close to God, so close to the holy.

Please pray that someday, stumbling through this worship service, we may be granted such a moment of wonder. Pray that the beauty of God might shine brightly through to us, might reach down to us. May that happen to you today in worship. If not today, soon, soon.

It does happen. When the serious business that we do here just sails. When the sunlight comes through this big window just right, when the music of Lynn on the organ or the full honey tones of our amazing chancel choir or a certain song by our contemporary worship band just makes the hair on your arms stand up, it is so much better than any of my feeble words. This is when religion rises.

Take us up the mountain and light the fire, remove the veil, let there be blinding light. And together, let's shout, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"