

“Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes”¹

Today is the last Sunday after the Epiphany. Throughout this season of Epiphany, the gospel lessons we have heard each Sunday have been stories that reveal something of Jesus’ holiness to us. These are stories that point beyond Jesus of Nazareth the man and toward Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. These stories include Jesus’ baptism, calling of the disciples, teaching with power in the synagogue, and miraculous healing and exorcism. Perhaps the most remarkable, the most profound revelation of Jesus as God’s anointed one is in today’s reading of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Transfiguration is defined as, “A marked change in form or appearance; a metamorphosis.” By that definition I expect that you and I have experienced the transfiguration of a person. Recall the first meeting of someone with whom you would fall in love. You may have seen a photograph of that person or met that person in passing and noticed nothing particularly remarkable in his or her appearance. But then there was that special moment, when you spoke for the first time and the sound of her voice or the way he said your name or touched your hand caused that person’s appearance to change in your eyes. It is as if she went from being a two dimensional cutout to a full person in the blink of an eye. Did that person change? Not really. But your perception of that person changed. One moment she was just a cute girl across the room, and the next moment she was intriguing, charming, remarkably beautiful, and glowing in a way you had never seen before.

It can also happen with people that we have known for a long time. I think especially of that time in our lives when we suddenly recognize our parents as real human beings and not just our parents. That day when we perceive that our parents can think or act in ways that are separate from us. We have always seen them through the filter of mom or dad. Whatever they do or say is always experienced in how it affects us as their children. But one day they say something or do something and we suddenly realize that they are people whose lives have not always been inextricably intertwined with ours. They are real honest to goodness people, and not solely our parents. They did not change, but our perception of them did.

I expect what happened on that mountain for Peter, James and John was similar. Jesus did not all of a sudden change into the Messiah the Son of God. Rather Peter, James and John experienced Jesus in a new way. They had inklings of the uniqueness of Jesus. They had experienced the power of his call to become his disciples. They had heard him preach and teach. They had seen him perform healings and exorcisms. But on that day, on that mountain something was different.

¹ Apologies to David Bowie

Perhaps something happened as they climbed the mountain that day. Jesus said something or did something that tripped the switch. Whatever it was it was profound, because the description of Jesus is quite remarkable. Matthew states, "...his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white."² Think of how little the Gospels tell us about Jesus' appearance. Yet here it was important to note how he looked.

What's more Matthew then tells us that the three disciples witness Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. Moses is the revered leader of the Jews who led them out of bondage in Egypt and to the Promised Land working many miracles along the way. Elijah was the great prophet who defeated the 450 priests of Ba'al, and struggled with and overcame the wicked Ahab and Jezebel thus bringing the people of Israel back to the LORD. Jesus holds counsel with the greatest of the Hebrew people, symbols of the Law and the Prophets.

Then for good measure a cloud envelopes the mountaintop. If you have ever driven through dense fog you know how disorienting it is. The edges of the road, other cars, their taillights, landmarks, all disappear. It is as if you are in a different world. Then a voice comes from the cloud saying "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"³ If the disciples ever questioned Jesus' authority, the voice put an end to that.

Indeed, after the Transfiguration the disciples no longer wonder who Jesus is. There is no question that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and the Son of God. The disciples might squabble over who was the best, or not be able to figure out the meaning of a parable, but for all of their shortcomings they were clear about Jesus and the meaning of his ministry. Jesus' transfiguration had also caused a change in them.

As we end the season of Epiphany and enter the season of Lent we too have the opportunity to be changed. We can come closer to the child of God we were created to be.

In a few days the Church will invite us into a holy Lent. As we prepare I suggest that while we might give up something for Lent, we can do more. We can be transfigured by encountering the Gospel and pondering the revelations of Jesus that we have seen in the scriptures and in our lives. We can open our hearts to the world around us. We can, as Jesus told us a few weeks ago, be salt of the earth and light to the world. We can, as if by metamorphosis, transform from the caterpillar of our world weary selves into the glorious butterfly that God created us to be.

This Lent don't settle for giving up meat or chocolate or wine, seek something more. Seek the change that Christ can bring into your life. Be transfigured before each other, before yourself, and before God.

² Matthew 17:2

³ Matthew 17:5