

## “Turning Points & Transfigurations.”

We’ve just heard the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. It’s one of the most important stories in the life of the Christian church, and we know this for a couple of reasons.

First of all, this story appears in three of the four Gospels — in Matthew, Mark, and Luke — which tells us that the authors of those Gospels thought it was important enough to include in their manuscripts.

Add to this the fact that we read the story of the transfiguration twice each year, which tells us that *we* still take it very seriously. Why that is the case, hopefully, will become clear.

In a nutshell, this is the story of the transfiguration. One day, Jesus goes to the top of a nearby mountain to pray. He’s taken with him three of his disciples: Peter, James, and John. Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, Jesus undergoes a physical transformation: his face and clothing begin to shine. And then, Moses and Elijah appear in their midst, and they begin talking with Jesus. Finally, a cloud covers the mountaintop, and from the cloud the voice of God can be heard to say, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

And even though we might argue about the various elements of the story, one thing is clear: the transfiguration was *a turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus*. Because, from that point onward, Jesus knew that the path he had chosen was going to lead him to Jerusalem, where his ministry — *and life* — would undoubtedly come to an end.

At some point in our own spiritual journeys, we might all have wished to have a similar “mountaintop experience,” where the audible voice of God affirms us, and points us in the direction we are to go.

I’m not sure I’ve ever had such an experience, and I suspect most of you haven’t either. But something we all *do* share in common with Jesus are the turning points in our lives. They’re likely much less dramatic than what Jesus experienced, but they can be just as significant, and we need to know how to recognize them.

And the Gospels tells us how we can recognize when we've come to a turning point. And their advice is this: Listen and look. Listen to Jesus — I mean really take the *time* to listen — and then look for signs of transfiguration taking place in the ordinary events of our lives.

For example:

- Listen to Jesus in the parent who decides to turn off the television, or set aside the newspaper, and instead spends time with their child. That's a turning point in that parent's life. And there we see a transfiguration taking place in their life.
- Likewise, consider the child whose parent has chosen to spend a good portion of their evening helping them with their homework, or listening to their concerns, or reading with them. That child has encountered a turning point. That child is being transfigured.

Or,

- Listen to Jesus in the police officer who, in the normal and routine course of their duties, makes the choice to risk life or health to protect the life of another. That's a turning point in that officer's life. And that's where we see a transfiguration taking place.
- Likewise, the man or woman, whose life and security are preserved by a stranger in uniform, has encountered a turning point in *their* life. *That* person is being transfigured.

Or, finally,

- Listen to Jesus in the family that makes the decision to give up something they want, so that another family — and a family of strangers no less — can have something they need. That's a turning point for that family. And there we see a transfiguration taking place.

- Likewise the family that finally has what they need, because another family was willing to give up something which they wanted, has encountered a turning point in their life. That family is being transfigured.

I mentioned earlier that three of the four gospels mention the transfiguration in their texts. Those same gospels *precede* the story of the transfiguration with an account of Jesus predicting his suffering and death, and then encouraging his disciples to take up their own cross.

And then, those same three gospels *end* their account of the transfiguration with the voice of God, coming from a cloud, and saying: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

You see, whenever *we* encounter someone whose need we can meet, we’ve encountered a turning point. And whenever we meet that need, giving selflessly and sacrificially, we’ve experienced a transfiguration in our life, and God is “well pleased.”

And whenever someone has reached out to *us*, and given to us, selflessly and sacrificially, we have also reached a turning point in our lives. For at that moment, we are given the opportunity to “go and do likewise.” And when we choose to do just that, God is “well pleased.”

In the end, when we give, we are changed. And when we receive, we are changed. That’s the transfiguration taking place in our lives, and in the lives of the people around us. And every day we have the opportunity to see, and maybe even take part in, the lives of men and women and children who are being transfigured. That is, if we listen to Jesus, and see the hand of God in the turning points in our lives.

And so, as you go from this place this morning, do so with the intention of listening to Jesus, and look for the turning points; and maybe you’ll get to see a transfiguration taking place this very day.

Amen.