



'No Ordinary Sunday: Living in Hope'

Transfiguration of Our Lord
8:30 & 10:45 am, Sunday, February 7, 2016
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Exodus 34:29-35](#); [2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2](#);
[Luke 9:28-36 \[37-43a\]](#)

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dr. James Forbes, the pastor emeritus of The Riverside Church in New York City, has an interesting take on this Transfiguration event recorded in Luke. Forbes sees the Transfiguration as a kind of divine encouragement given to Jesus. A much-needed encouragement. After all, Jesus had, just prior to his mountain climb, prophesied his own suffering, death, and resurrection. And after this trek up the mountain, Jesus would go back down the mountain to the hard work set before him...caring for the least and the lost, and journeying to the cross for the world's sake.

When that voice in the cloud proclaimed to Peter and James and John on that mountain "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Forbes says it was "the highest form of encouragement. To be affirmed by God and to have one's friends and supporters urged by God to take heed...that is encouragement..." (James Forbes, "The Vocation of Encouragement")

That's an interesting take on the story. Although trying to figure out exactly what Jesus was feeling or what Jesus needed at that moment is fraught with difficulty. Most of the time, our gospel writers don't give us that insight into our Lord's interior. We can only guess. Forbes guesses that Jesus may well have needed encouragement to stay the course, to go the journey.

Well, I don't know about that, but I'm thinking that the story of the Transfiguration, as a story of encouragement, is more directed toward Jesus' **disciples**. And not just Peter, James and John, but you and me as well. This moment where Jesus is wrapped in light, displaying how he is fully God, fully divine (in addition to being fully human) is for **our** encouragement. So we can stay the course, go the journey. Surely we need that encouragement these days.

Remember the weekend of the Blizzard of 2016? Not only did the blizzard provide us with a large blanket of snow, but it also blanketed our minds enough so that for 48 hours or more, we didn't have to think about the troubles of the world. Last Sunday I led our new member class in an icebreaker of sorts, asking what was the best thing about the Blizzard. In spite of the inconvenience and sore muscles, their responses were uniformly positive: "We saw our neighbors and helped each other out!" "We relaxed and played with the kids!" "The dogs had a grand time scampering through the snow!" "I cooked up a storm

and we ate comfort foods!" "It was so peaceful and silent and beautiful!" Perhaps those class attendees might even have termed the blizzard event as transfiguring...

The Blizzard, in a sense, was a break from the world.

But now the snow is melting, and we're back in the thick of things, aren't we? A rancorous political campaign. Hot spots of danger around the world. Homicides in Harrisburg. Poisoned water in Flint. Refugees with no place to go. The list is endless and mind-boggling. Makes us want to stay safely enveloped in the warmth of our homes, watching the silent snow fall.

That's what Peter wanted to do. He wanted to stay up on the mountain. He wanted to bask in this beauty and glory and divine moment where he recognized the divine in his teacher, Jesus. But the voice from heaven—the same voice that spoke to Jesus himself at his baptism, and called him his beloved Son—that voice now said to Peter, James and John: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

And the one they've been commanded to listen to will go back down the mountain to work, to inaugurate the Kingdom of God in a dark, troubled world.

I say the glimpse of divine glory in the face of Jesus was meant to encourage the **disciples**. Just **enough** encouragement to fill them with hope, strengthen them, and embolden them for the tasks they would take up alongside Jesus. Just **enough** encouragement to listen to Jesus continually for the guidance they would need.

In fact, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that voice from heaven (understood all these centuries as the Lord God Almighty) was not only encouraging the disciples, but offering divine endorsement of Jesus.

Now "endorsements" these days are highly prized, especially by our various presidential candidates. Donald Trump basked in the endorsement of Sarah Palin. Senator Pat Toomey has recently endorsed Marco Rubio. Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton are still duking it out for all those union endorsements. *The New York Times* endorsed John Kasich. An important endorsement can influence voters to believe a particular candidate is the right person to tackle their concerns, the right person for the job.

Well, at the Transfiguration, God the Father basically endorses Jesus. "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" God's saying Jesus is the right person for the job. The right one to tackle our sinfulness and the sting of death head-on. The right one to offer healing for a world's brokenness. The right one to gather God's people together in mutual love and care. This is what Peter, James and John discover on that mountaintop. God offered them encouragement **and** endorsement.

The generations of Christians who came after the first disciples were also encouraged by this Transfiguration story. That's why we read it every year just before the Church season of Lent. We hear this story just before we focus in on Jesus' journey to the cross and contemplate our own discipleship that may very well involve sacrifice.

Even Paul ends up talking about the Transfiguration indirectly to the Corinthians in his second letter to them today. And it's clear he sees that this revealed glory in Jesus is a moment of encouragement. Paul writes, "Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness." (3:12) Later on he writes, "Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart." (4:1)

But then Paul takes it to the next level. It isn't just that we have been moved emotionally by the vision of Jesus transfigured in all that divine glory. It isn't just that we "ooo" and "aahh" at the thought of Jesus wrapped in light. Paul indicates that because of Jesus Christ, you and I are continually being transfigured **ourselves. We** are being changed from, as Paul says, "one degree of glory to another." Every day as we live in Jesus Christ we are being encouraged and renewed and energized and transformed into the people God created us to be—the image of Jesus Christ, right here in our own lives. Jesus is the right one to do this job—changing **us**.

Dr. Forbes says, "In the current climate of discouragement, dismay, depression, and demoralization, we need a massive infusion of encouragement." Well, by golly, this gospel story, this good news of the Transfiguration does exactly that. Thus we can live in hope. We can act with boldness. And we do not lose heart. **AMEN.**

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