

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY, YEAR A, AUGUST 6, 2023

When I was the rector of Church of the Saviour in Denville I had a parishioner who not only looked like Santa but was Santa every year for the kids. He had shoulder length wavy white hair and a full white beard. Lang was also our resident handyman and the kids in the daycare were always awestruck when they saw “Santa” fixing things around the building. He would always tease them that he was checking up on them to see if they were being good.

One day, I saw his wife Lynn come in the parish hall doors with a gentlemen and I turned to my parish administrator and asked, “Do you know who that is with Lynn?” She looked and shrugged her shoulders. When Lynn walked into the office with her escort, he took off his hat and there stood Lang with short hair and clean shaven. Both mine and my parish administrators mouths dropped open as we looked at his unbelievable transformation. We were incredulous at how different he looked.

Have you ever run into someone you haven’t seen for a long time and almost didn’t recognize them because of some kind of transformation. Or perhaps you have physically altered your appearance in some small way that rendered you “transformed” for a short period of time. I remember when my daughter was a senior in high school and decided she wanted to have bangs and it totally changed how she looked. Friends and teachers didn’t recognize her that first day because of the transformation that simple haircut made. In fact one teacher marked her absent as he didn’t recognize her sitting in his class. But I want you to remember the story about Lang as I will come back to it.

Today’s gospel story is about Jesus’ transfiguration. We could also call it his transformation as that is how the disciples perceived him. We’re told Jesus was praying like he’d done numerous times when all of sudden Jesus is lit up like a stage spotlight has been focused on him while Moses and Elijah are magically returned from the dead.

To the disciples eyes, Jesus whole appearance has been transformed in front of them. His face has changed and his clothes are a brilliant white. Sometimes, I think we get too caught up with our focus on the transformation of Jesus rather than the change that took place in the three disciples who were watching. It’s at this moment after months of living and serving with Jesus that they see Jesus not just in a different light but also a new reality. They finally have their eyes opened to recognizing who Jesus is. Seeing Moses and Elijah next to Jesus solidifies a spiritual maturity that takes place in them in order for them to see that in Jesus the law and the prophets are fulfilled.

This doesn’t mean there was no Transfiguration of Jesus. Instead of focusing on a change happening to Jesus we are looking at the change happening to the disciples in which the Holy Spirit showed them who Jesus was all along. The Transfiguration is perhaps more about how the spiritual perception of Jesus by Peter, John, and James was transfigured.

What the disciples are confronted with is seeing a different side of Jesus. They become privy to how in Jesus they see how God is unbelievably powerful and yet God is also personal and loving, dwelling within us to comfort and support us. God is both the amazingly powerful creator who has flung the stars so far into space that it takes millions of years for their light to reach us. And God is also so intimate to us that God

not only loves us and forgives us, but God values us and tells us that God trusts us to do God's work in the world. These are all the things that Jesus has been telling them and us.

Jesus tells us: "You are the light of the world." He doesn't say, "You can be the light of the world." Or, "You should be the light of the world." He says, "You ARE the light of the world." He says, "You are the salt of the earth." He says, "You are the children of God."

Now, I just want to go back to the story of my former parishioner Lang for a moment. After getting over the initial shock of seeing him so completely transformed I asked him why he cut his hair and shaved his beard. His response was simple. He did it to see if he looked like his father at the same age and wanted to see a new view of himself.

Well, don't we want to see a more encompassing view of God? Don't we want to know how God sees us? Don't we want to know the view God has of us? Don't we want to know if God's view of us is the same we have of ourselves? If we listen to Jesus and trust him and believe what he says about us then that can give us a whole new view of ourselves. We can see ourselves as God sees us: as forgiven sinners, as beloved saints, as valued people who are entrusted to be Christ's body in the world. We can see ourselves as children of God.

Transfiguration is not so much about what we see but how we see. It's the difference between seeing with physical eyes and seeing with faith filled eyes. As long as we see only with physical eyes we will always be looking for love, bored with life, bereft of joy, bound by guilt, and in fear of death.

Will we continue to live as if what we see is all we get or will we let our seeing bring us face to face with the expansiveness of God's love? Faith lived eyes do not deny or ignore the circumstances of our life or world. They show us, rather, that in the midst of and sometimes despite those circumstances there is nothing but God, in fact, there is only God; there is nothing but life, there is only life; there is nothing but love, there is only love; and there is nothing but light, there is only light.

This deeper seeing, this transfigured vision, is what allows us to face, endure, and respond to the circumstances of our life and world. It is why we can get up and not be afraid. It is the source of our thanksgivings. We will not be put off by those who would put us down. We will not be stopped by low self-esteem. We will not be discouraged by disappointments or defeated by difficulties. We will persevere because we know that Jesus says we "are the light of the world. We are the salt of the earth. We are children of God." We have been transfigured and transformed by God. And we can have that new view, not only of God, but of ourselves.

Someone once asked Helen Keller if there was anything worse than losing one's sight. She replied, "It is much worse to lose your vision of who you are than it is to lose your sight."

We need to each have a vision of what it means to be a child of God. If we keep that vision in front of us we can do what needs to be done. Someone wise has said, "Whether life grinds you down or polishes you depends on what you are made of." We are made of the right stuff because God is the one who created us. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, God continues to recreate us and renew us, giving us the strength we need. We cannot choose what happens to us, but we can choose how we

respond to it. We can choose to try to make something good come out of whatever comes our way.

The transfiguration gives us a new view of Jesus. It reminds us that besides being our friend, our good shepherd, and our savior, Jesus is also God in all God's glory. God is awesomely powerful and wise beyond our imagination. God is present with us in everything.

In God's wisdom and power God gives us a new view of ourselves as God chooses to use us to do God's work in the world. Just as Jesus tells us we are the "light of the world, the salt of the earth, and children of God then let us make sure we see ourselves in this new way. Let's make sure that we share the good news that God loves and values not just us, but all the people of the world. And let's make sure we share that good news with "Anybody. Any place. Anytime." Amen.