

## Matthew 17.1-9

### “Transfigured by Mystery”

**“And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun,  
and his clothes became dazzling white.”**

I recently spent two weeks with my brother and sister-in-law in southern Ontario. We were together caring for my mom after she fell and broke her hip. Following my mother’s surgery, my brother returned to his home in Tobermory leaving Sandi, his wife, and I to carry on. I have known Sandi a long time – longer than my brother has. We went to high school together and shared a couple of classes. We have not been particularly close and we have exchanged some angry words over the years. Even a few during the two weeks we were together.

After a particularly long day sitting with mom at the hospital we both were hungry for something different and Sandi did not feel much like cooking and I never feel like cooking. So, we decided to go out for sushi. We went to a little place called *Seasons* in downtown St. Catharines. We ordered a whole host of interesting little dishes. If it had been a

Mediterranean restaurant we would have called them tapas. We had no idea what we were ordering. We ordered from an iPad that they brought to the table with pictures of all the dishes that they served. It was an incredible feast of amazing tastes.

It was a wonderful evening. The conversation was deep and raw. Somewhere between the spicy tuna roll and the mango chicken something mysterious happened. Sandi was transfigured right before my eyes. There was no bright light, her clothes did not become dazzling white and Moses and Elijah did not show up, but she changed. I finally saw beyond the girl who made fun of me in music class because I could not play the French horn very well. I finally saw beyond the woman who always seemed to know more than me about what was best for my own mother. I finally saw beyond the woman that stole the family cottage and made it her own home. I saw a woman who was as frightened about the bullies in high school as I was. I saw a woman who truly loved my mother as much as I loved her. I saw a woman whose life had not been easy. She lost her mom when she was young. Her daughter ran away at thirteen and lived on the streets of

Toronto for a few years. Her son died nameless and penniless in a dumpy hotel in Edmonton at the age of thirty-one. Suddenly, Sandi became real to me in a way that she had never been and my heart softened. I saw her in a new light. She was transfigured.

There is an important spiritual principle in that story. When we take the time to lean into mystery, the unknown and tarry there long enough we open ourselves up to the possibility of something changing in us and a transfiguration occurring.

We see this principle clearly illustrated in our story today from the gospel of Matthew. Jesus invites Peter, James and John to join him on the mountain. As they tarry there on that mountain with Jesus, something happens and they begin to see Jesus in a brand-new light. They have a profound experience of Jesus being transfigured before their eyes. The story tells us that there was a bright light, Jesus' clothes became dazzling white, Moses and Elijah joined him and they heard a voice from within a cloud declaring; "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased;

listen to him.” In that moment, Peter, James and John discover that there was something more to this wisdom teacher than they had initially thought.

We might think of this story as nothing more than a good piece of theology telling us some important things about Jesus. For instance, Jesus being seen with Elijah and Moses suggests that Jesus is a part of the on-going story of God’s people. Further, the repeating of the words that God spoke to Jesus at his baptism, “this is my son, my beloved, with who I am well pleased,” would suggest that the two events are connected in some way.

Notice that in this story there is the addition of the words; “listen to him.” This was an important invitation to the early readers of the gospel – don’t stray to far from the example of Jesus. It is also a vital invitation for us contemporary followers of Jesus. What would it mean for us to “listen to Jesus” as we struggle with how to live faithfully as his disciples in our current context? Does Jesus have anything to tell us about living with respect with creation, or about living into right relations with our First Nations sisters and

brothers, or about dealing with systemic poverty, or about church decline?

But, is there more to this story than just theology?

We also know that for Peter, at least, the transfiguration was a life changing experience. Near the end of his life he describes the event in these words from 2 Peter; “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.” Peter boldly declares that he was there on that holy mountain on that amazing day. He saw the whole thing with his own eyes. But, is there more to this story than a life changing moment in Peter’s life?

I want to believe that one of the messages of this story is that transfiguration moments are always possible for all of us. God is always inviting us to holy mountains to be touched by God’s power and love. The

universe is charged with divine energy that is just waiting to reveal itself to us, if we have eyes open to see and a heart willing to receive. God is always yearning to find a moment to break into our lives and tell us we are loved. The Divine Mystery is constantly seeking new ways to burst into our world spreading light, love and joy.

Transfiguration moments come in many shapes and sizes. They are there for us to savour. They are often spontaneous and unscripted. They cannot be forced, artificially created or manipulated. Transfiguration moments take patience, openness and willingness. Transfiguration moments come to us when we are mindful and awake to the Divine mystery that is at loose in our world. Good transfiguration moments will also change us and remain with us throughout our lives.

Let me conclude with another example of a transfiguration moment in my own life. I was taught as a child the stereotypical images of First Nation people. I do not need to be specific about them other than to say they were not good. Unfortunately, those stereotypes remained unchecked within me for many years. Eventually, the journey of my life took me to Bella Coola as

a social worker. Bella Coola is a small isolated village on the central coast of British Columbia. It is the home of the Nuxalk First Nation. I returned to Bella Coola several years later as a United Church minister. As I lived among them I learned many things that challenged all my stereotypes. As I tarried there walking with them on their sacred land and sharing their joys and pains they were transfigured before me. Again, there was no bright light, their clothes did not turn dazzling white, Moses and Elijah did not join us and I did not hear a voice from the clouds, and yet a transfiguration moment occurred. I began to see the Nuxalk people in a new light and with an awakened heart.

I remember one vivid moment. I sat in the home of a woman elder. As her bread was baking in the oven and its delicious smell filling her home, she told me her story. She told me about her experience in the residential school in Port Alberni. She told me about life on the reserve before the kids were taken away. She told me about her beautiful son who was a gifted traditional dancer who tragically died of alcoholism. It was not an easy story to hear, but her pain transfigured her and changed me.

Where do we need to be transfigured today? Who do we need to see in a new light? Our story comes to us today to remind us that transfigurations are possible, if we are willing to lean into the mystery that surrounds us and let the Divine mystery do its work. Let us invite the Holy Spirit to come and awaken our hearts and open our eyes to the transfigurations that God wants to bless us with this day. **Amen.**