

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA  
Last Sunday after Epiphany, Year A, February 26, 2017  
The Rev. Bill Queen  
“Our Transfiguration”  
2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

have you ever noticed that the older you get, the more you look and act like yourself?; that may sound obvious, but I think it reflects a deeper truth than just perhaps our falling into routines in our life; over a period of years we do become, in every way, a reflection of all of our life’s choices; years of smiles and years of cares show; the emotions that we have returned to time and time again become etched into our faces, just like the way that what we have eaten shapes the rest of our bodies; and beyond our physical features, the habits that we have fallen into over the years shape our actions into patterns of how we tend to act and patterns of how we tend to think

what we heard described in our gospel reading today about Jesus’ Transfiguration--and that word means, literally, the changing of his face--is the opposite of what happens to us; during the experience of the Transfiguration Jesus’ face didn’t show what his past had been like, it showed what his future would look like; it was a change from his usual, human likeness, into a vision of his full glory, of his post-resurrection self, with his face shining like the sun, and his clothes dazzling white--the way I expect we’ll see Jesus when we meet him face to face

this experience on the high mountain took place six days after Peter, one of the ones accompanying Jesus, had declared him to be “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16); but it was also six days after Jesus had told his disciples, in no uncertain terms, that in Jerusalem he would be killed, “and on the third day be raised” (Matthew 16:21); this mountaintop experience was meant to show his key disciples, his inner circle of followers, what he would look like at that third day’s resurrection; it was a vision of the future, given to them by God, to help them come to terms with Jesus’ words, and to strengthen them for the difficult time ahead

what effect did it have on these three disciples?; they were scared, that’s understandable--they’d never seen anything like this before: Moses and Elijah, in person, speaking in front of them, and the voice of God booming out of the cloud; and Peter makes the equally understandable suggestion that they should build some

little mountain chalets there, so they could all keep this good thing going; Jesus, Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, and John--a little private religious commune way up there on the mountain, away from the world, away from its cares, and, most importantly, away from the death that Jesus said awaited him

but when the vision is over and Jesus looks like himself again, they do go down the mountain to face the future; and Jesus orders them not to tell anyone what they'd seen until after his resurrection; they probably kept their word, you don't go against what Jesus orders you to do; but do you think their faces looked the same when they came down off that mountain?; they didn't have to say anything about it, the other disciples could see that something amazing had happened to them up there; Peter and James and John had had their own kind of Transfiguration; they'd been changed, and it must have showed

even if you have had some high points in your life of faith when you felt the extreme power of God's presence, I doubt any of us had had quite the same type of mountaintop experience as these disciples had; but we all have the advantage of having something they didn't have; we know the whole story of Jesus' resurrection and the way it gave new life to enough people to found and continue this faith that is still vibrantly alive to this day; and since our baptisms, we have had the gift of the Holy Spirit within us--something these disciples will have to wait until the Day of Pentecost to receive; these disciples saw only a brief vision of Jesus as the glorified Christ, but us current day disciples have had the benefit of seeing and experiencing God working throughout our entire lives

and should not all of that show, both in the way we lead our lives, as well as in our faces?; and should not we, as Christians, not only be growing to look and act like our true selves, but also growing to look and act more and more like Jesus?--and I don't mean sandals and beard and robe; shouldn't we look and act more like Jesus in the way we demonstrate compassion to those around us?; shouldn't we look and act more like Jesus in the way we let prayer guide our life decisions; shouldn't we look and act more like Jesus in the way we give of ourselves? yes, and yes, and yes; our belief, our faith, our relationship to Christ should change us to be more and more like Christ himself; this is the lifelong transformation each Christian is supposed to go through; this is our Transfiguration

so here we are together again on another Sunday morning; here we are gathered together as Jesus' disciples; through scripture, through prayer, through praise, and through the receiving of Holy Communion, we have another opportunity to

experience Jesus in his glory; our worship should be a mountaintop experience--but that requires us to give ourselves over to it and to be fully engaged in it; and what we experience in this mountaintop of worship gives us another opportunity to learn how to show a face and lead a life that more closely resembles Jesus'

we have this season of Lent ahead of us, starting with Ash Wednesday this week, to examine our lives and see just how far along we are in becoming our true selves, our true Christian selves, our true Christ-like selves; my prayer for all of us today is what you've heard me pray as the blessing at the end of every service throughout this Epiphany season: "May Christ, the Son of God, be manifest in you, that your lives may be a light to the world;" my prayer is that each of us may continue to undergo our Transfiguration, so that others will see Christ in us; we have been changed, and we must show that in our lives and in our faces