March 3rd – 10:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

The Shining, Bright, and Dazzling Light

I. A Life and Death Moment

When I consider this ‘shining, bright, and dazzling light’ in our own modern context, I think about the experiences of people who have had a ‘near death experience.’ They, not all, but many share about this bright white and blinding light that they see, some see it as God, and some not. Yet, whatever you want to call this experience – the people who have experience this near death experience have been indelibly changed. They can’t go back to the way things were before – the experience that they have had ultimately changes them and the way they experience the world and interpret life’s events are seen through another looking glass.

II. The Moment of Glory

I think this feeling of transformation, and awe, and change probably stands true for Peter, James, and John who jointly experience this glory of blinding light. In human terms, they try to make sense of it, as any one of us might do – they see Elijah and Moses, and confused as they may be about that, they say that they will make houses. Something tangible, something that they can do when nothing else right now makes sense in their world.

I can imagine Peter and James and John looking at one another, giving that look of, ‘Do you see what I see? Am I – have I lost it?’ – there is a communal transformation happening within and through these men.

And then a cloud comes over them, and like a view from a fog magic show, there appears Jesus, without Elijah and Moses, and the men stand there baffled. It is recorded that they stay silent and do not tell anyone about what they have seen. Maybe they stayed silent because they knew or felt that no one would believe them. Maybe they stayed silent because they, in using their rational brains, could not comprehend what they have seen. Maybe they kept silent because they knew they could not go back to the lives they lived before – that they were indelibly changed – and that was awesome and both terrifying.

III. Transformation

The passage we hear from the Old Testament today is a reflection again, a reminder that God comes in glory – in these bright and shimmering, blinding transformations. We see that God uses ordinary people, like you and me, like Moses, like Peter, James, and John, and gives us these transformative moments that cannot be explained through human language, but rather, it is human experience that makes one believe in our God of Glory.

In realistic terms, if I sat down with someone at a coffee shop and went through the Old Testament and went through the delicate intricacies of the Hebrew language – would that be a transformative moment -- Maybe, but it’s more of an educational moment – and while that is important – transformation isn’t born often out of deep theological study. Transformation more often comes from experience, from the moments where you or I experience God in a way that we can’t explain: love from a perfect stranger, the moment where someone is healed in a way that we cannot explain through science or medicine, or the overwhelming feeling you have when you sit in God’s creation and recognize that something much larger than yourself is creating the ebb and flow of the waves and the stars moving in the sky.

IV. Transformation vs. Transfiguration

Today, we celebrate the last Sunday of Epiphany, which is called ‘Transfiguration Sunday.’ I’ve often thought the word transfiguration was a challenging term, as it’s only really in the Scripture that we talk about transfiguration. So, what is it? It is the moment that Moses has and the people around him, it is the moment that Peter and James and John experience with Jesus.

But in more layman’s terms, transfiguration is a transformation or a metamorphosis – but even in stronger language. This is more than a caterpillar turning into a butterfly – which is in itself a miracle. This is metamorphosis where you can’t go back to the way things were before – and particularly, the transformation is a spiritual transformation. It is one where the experiences we have ultimately transform how we interpret our life and faith.

V. Brevity

I promised I would be brief today – I know there is communion awaiting and pancakes downstairs. I know I lose people and myself when I start to smell bacon and the sweet smell of pancakes, but here’s what I want to convey to you primarily on this Sunday – this Sunday of transfiguration.

Transfiguration – the metamorphosis of how we see our lives through new spiritual lenses – is a beautiful gift from God. Some people see that in bright lights, and most people experience it differently. This week, I want you to consider where your moments of transfiguration have taken place – maybe it’s a sweeping large event, perhaps it’s a moment sitting near the stream and you had a revelation. Maybe you’re awaiting the transfiguration. Wherever you are, on this spiritual journey, I ask you to give God the glory as we continue to learn, grow, and transform into the people we are called to be. Amen.

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