

Transfiguration B  
February 11, 2018

Grace, Lexington  
Fr. James

II Kings 2:1-12 Psalm 50:1-6 II Corinthians 4:3-6 *Mark 9:2-9*

### **Minds on Divine Things**

In the preceding events in Mark's Gospel Jesus has been teaching his disciples about his imminent death following an experience of great suffering. Peter was so concerned that he pulled Jesus aside and remonstrated with him about such talk. That was the occasion when Jesus responded with “Get behind me, Satan for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Six days later Jesus takes Peter along with James and John up a mountain and there he was transfigured. The six day reference suggests that they did their climb on the Sabbath or in time for the Sabbath. The glory which transfigured Moses, Elijah and Jesus was like the

glory of the resurrection itself. So lets look again at the chronological unfolding of this event. Jesus teaches about his passion, his death and after three days, his resurrection. The following Sabbath he takes the three disciples up the mountain and there they have a focussed experience of the glory, the doxa, of God. Peter and the others suddenly have their minds on divine things. They could do no other. So for Mark this story was an extension of the passion prediction made by Jesus in chapter nine seen through the lens of the resurrection itself. Peter *had* to deny it when Jesus first taught them what to expect. It is hard to believe that he had to deny *anything* about the passion following the experience on the holy mountain.

William Boggs' grandfather played a very important role in his life. Grandpa Boggs had been blind

for nearly twenty years. Grandpa would tell you quickly that the way the world was going he didn't much care to see it anyway. He did have one regret however. He had never seen his grandson.

Sensing death closing in on him, William's grandfather began praying more intensely for the Lord to give him sight, just long enough to see his grandson before he died. The doctors had told him that it was an impossibility because his eyes had long since turned a milky blue from a disease.

One day Grandpa was playing with his grandson when suddenly he could see. The whole family ran out into the yard to see what all the fuss was and quickly grew quiet as it became apparent that his vision had returned. Grandpa picked up his grandson, whom he had never seen, and stared at him with an intensity that

frightened the child. William remembers holding his face between his small hands while both of them cried. Then in the most frightening moment of all, Grandpa saw something in William. It was an unbelievable, once in a lifetime experience. Grandpa looked his grandson in the eyes and softly said, "a preacher." That was all he said. Just those two words so quietly uttered with a tone of surprise. Thirty years later William wonders which was the greater miracle "that he could see or that he could see something so deeply hidden in William and William's distant future. William believes that his grandfather's voice that day was the voice of God. God breaks into our lives suddenly and distinctly. At such times our perspectives are changed. King Duncan, Collected Sermons, [www.sermons.com](http://www.sermons.com)

This happened to Peter on the holy mountain. When has

this happened to you?

This experience for Peter and James and John on the Holy Mountain is an example of early theological interpretation, for the Transfiguration sees the prediction of the passion as resulting in glory, in victory, in triumph. Moses represented the order of the Law. And Elijah represented the prophet, the coming to pass of the end of the age, and the beginning of the new. But Jesus alone is the one left to confront, embrace and give hope for the future of redemption.

His teaching that he is to suffer and die at the hands of the Jewish leaders is shown to be fully in accordance with the will of God the Father who speaks to the disciples and instructs them to “Listen to Jesus,” his beloved. There is no greater confirmation of his messiahship to be had. There is also heard, in the word

heard from the cloud, echoes of God's speaking to Moses and promising a prophet who would come like Moses, but at a later time.

There may even be overtones of a vision of Jesus as he would come to his disciples in the parousia, the second and final coming at the end of time. Oh, the glory, the shekinah glory of God is magnified in this transfiguration in marvelous overtones of joy, magnificence and light, shimmering, divine even cataclysmic light resonate of the very presence of God.

It was unlike Olivier Messiaen, the composer, ever to do things in small measure, especially late in his career. He had a vision of intense realization when he recognized the splendor of the gospel account of the transfiguration. He struggled to represent with music what was for him an emotional understanding...and he

struggled to bring the audience to the mountain top with him.

Wrote Messiaen, "It was in clear weather, whilst gazing at Mont Blanc and the Jungfrau, that I grasped the difference between the modest splendor of snow and the mighty splendor of the sun - that is also where I could imagine the extent of the awesomeness of the place of the Transfiguration."

Composed between 1965 and 1969, *La Transfiguration* is an intense meditation on the Transfiguration of Christ. Aspects of that divine synthesis are reflected by a dense mosaic of interwoven Latin texts, drawing on sources as diverse as the Gospels, Genesis, the Epistles of St Paul and the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. Yet even more kaleidoscopic are the large, complex forces for

which Messiaen calls, comprising six separate groups of musicians - 18 woodwind, 17 brass, 68 strings, six percussionists, a 100-strong choir, plus a further seven instrumental soloists. There's nothing false about La Transfiguration - ecstasy, joy, awe and terror are all there: what you hear is what you get. Messiaen: La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jesus-Christ Orchestre Philharmonique et Choeur de Radio France; Myung-Whun Chung, cond. (Deutsche Grammophon 471 569-2; 2 CDs) Brent Porterfield, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)

Lest you question too heartily about this story being seen through the lens of the resurrection, let me be quick to say that post resurrection followers of Jesus always saw the life, death, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus through the lens of resurrection. This is not difficult for us to understand, for we are personally likely to view historical figures through the lens of their ascension to true prominence. For example,

if I were to mention Donald Trump all of us would immediately think of him as the U.S. President.

Approving or disapproving, that is the way we shall always think of him. We may know lots of background about him prior to his surprise election, but from now he will first of all be President whether he wins or loses a second term. And so it was with Jesus. Whether individual disciples had ever known him prior to his baptism or not, following his death and resurrection most early Christians remembered him first through the lense of the resurrection. We now for over 20 centuries have had the stories of Jesus birth, his youth, to some extent, his baptism and so forth and may come looking through some other lense, Christmas, for example, something early Christians had no notion of. But in these early days, perhaps 35 or 40 years after the resurrection, Mark

would understand everything in Jesus earthly and heavenly existence through his understanding of the resurrection. That was central, that was fundamental, it shaped all perceptions of who this man was and is and ever will be.

There's a store-front church which is called Almighty God Tabernacle. One Saturday evening, the pastor of this church was working late, and decided to call his wife before he left for home. It was about 10 PM, but his wife did not answer the phone. The pastor let it ring about two dozen times but she didn't answer. He thought it was a little odd, but decided to finish up a few things and try a few minutes later.

When he tried again, she answered right away. He asked her why she hadn't answered before, and she said that the phone hadn't rung at their house. They brushed it

off as a fluke and went on their merry ways.

The following Monday, the pastor received a call at the church office, which was the phone that he'd used that Saturday night. The man that he spoke with wanted to know why he'd called on Saturday night. The pastor couldn't figure out what the guy was talking about. Then the guy said, "It rang and rang and rang, but I didn't answer."

The pastor then remembered the mishap and apologized for disturbing him, explaining that he'd tried to call his wife. The man said, "That's okay. Let me tell you my story. You see, I was planning to commit suicide on Saturday night, but before I did, I prayed, 'God if you're there, and you don't want me to do this, give me a sign now.' At that point my phone started to ring. I looked at the caller ID, and it said, 'Almighty God'. I was afraid

to answer!"

God is

still God. God still reaches out through the unexpected and transforms lives. Sometimes we're knowingly a part of that great ministry. Sometimes we have no clue. But with or without our awareness God still transforms lives.

Billy D. Strayhorn, Transformed

*So be it.*