

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
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Sermon by Timothy A Leitzke

It was late one night and the third period of the hockey game was about to begin when every part of my body said, “Eggs.” It was not a suggestion; it was a command. So I got up and pulled out three eggs and thought, *you know, this needs some chopped onion*, so I chopped some onion and softened it in the sizzling butter and thought, *this needs some cheese*, so after I threw in the eggs I sliced up some Colby Jack and laid it in the puddle of scrambled eggs and backed the heat way off and cooked it slowly, tantalizingly slowly. I flipped the concoction onto a plate and sat down with a knife and fork and indulged in the delicious blend of yolk and white and butter and cheese and onion and said aloud, though no one was in the room to hear me, “Oh that was tasty.” And at the sound of the word “tasty” I was shaken from my blissful reverie, for you see “tasty” is not my word of choice but it is someone’s word of choice, and my uttering that word filled me with the harrowing thought, “I have just turned into my father.” The late night omelet is not in my usual bag of tricks, but it is a mainstay of my father. Now, I know that I am not my father. I have attributes of other family members. I often take after my mom’s family. Without the beard I could pass for my father’s father when he was my age. I have qualities that are all my own. There’s no doubt that I am who I am; there’s just no doubt that the form of my father shines through every now and then. Look at the face, listen to the voice, squint just a little and there’s a metamorphosis.

In one dazzling moment on the mountaintop God's Son takes after the Father. There's a metamorphosis, or what we usually call a "transfiguration"; the form of God shines through in Jesus. The Son has just turned into the Father. Jesus is taking after God. The blinding light and heavenly voice and private chats with Moses and Elijah are not in Jesus' usual bag of tricks, but they're mainstays of God. In the blink of an eye Jesus will be back to normal, looking a bit like Joseph and a bit like Mary, taking after relatives and having qualities of his own, eating with sinners and healing sick people and being a person just like the rest of us. There's no doubt that Jesus is some guy; there's just no doubt that the form of God has shone through Jesus on the Mountain of Transfiguration.

This character, Jesus, is compelling to us. He is the most fully human character in all of scripture. He refuses to tempt God. He lives for his fellow humans. He accepts his limits. He dies as all of us do. The Jesus of scripture is the template of humanity, of humans as God meant them to be. That is radical in itself, but there's more. Jesus becomes the most like God of any character in scripture. He glows on the mountaintop, speaking with Moses and Elijah as God did. He takes after God so much that it becomes hard to distinguish him from God.

Honestly, there's no better person to have shine through you than God. There are many aspects of my father that I would be proud to have shine through me. There are certain aspects of my father that could or could not shine through me and I really wouldn't care. There are aspects of my father that I'd rather not show, that I hope I don't acquire. I'm guessing that a lot of us would say the same

thing. Friends of Christ, God's telltale habits—God's idiosyncrasies—are all worth having. The grace and love of God are the greatest gifts we can possess. To be transfigured as Christ is to be joined to God, to have a foretaste of the joy of the Resurrection. Christ does not get transfigured to prove to you and me that he's better than we are; God transfigures Christ to reveal to us the union that we can have with God. Friends of Christ, it is our goal in this life to join Christ in transfiguration, to be in such union with God that the light of God shines through us. This happens in two steps.

The first step occurs when we recognize that it all comes from God. This is harder than it sounds. From the old feminist false promise that, "You can have it all!" to the stereotypical male creed of showing no weakness, this is a world that teaches self-reliance. I'm not talking about knowing how to tie your shoes or make your breakfast or communicate coherently. The kind of self-reliance that the world teaches says that we should trust no one but ourselves and crush anyone who stands in our way. It tells us we're worthless unless we can do everything. At some point each of us reaches a limit. We can't have it all; our weakness is exposed. This revelation drives us to others. We need other people to help us; we need God to help us, and Friends of Christ, God helps. God loves us so much that regardless of our limits and sins God accepts us. God promises this and plants this promise in us. The Word of God, the water of Holy Baptism, and the bread and wine of Holy Communion repeat the promise again and again so that we can have faith in the midst of a world of doubt.

In the second step our faith receives the Holy Spirit. That promise that God plants in us receives the breath and life of God. The same life that lived in Christ lives in us, and makes us able to live by a different teaching. We are no longer self-reliant; we are God-reliant. We commend our lives to God and let God work through us. Friends of Christ, when we let go and let God live in us we can do awesome things. When we set aside “You can have it all” and let God give us what we need our lives become richer as we do God’s work. When we cast off our pretensions of invincibility our lives get richer as we begin living by grace, grace for ourselves and grace for others. This living faith, this life of faith, brings us closer to union with God. We are more fully human than we were before. We are closer to God because God has drawn us there.

None of it is our doing. God shines through of God’s own accord. God rolls away the stone from Jesus’ tomb. God spreads like wild mustard run amok in the garden. God is transforming the world, even if we work against God. Out of sickness comes healing. Out of abandonment comes fellowship. Out of crucifixion comes resurrection. In the mundane events of this dark and rotting world God breaks through and bathes us in God’s invincible light, transfiguring us all.

Jesus’ blinding metamorphosis lasts only a few seconds. The transfiguration is fleeting. It is the same for us. We remain in bondage to Sin: we are relentlessly tempted to depend upon ourselves. Our struggle—to be God-reliant—is a struggle that lasts our whole lives. It’s a struggle that God wins for us. In the middle of Mark’s gospel Jesus is transfigured, and in the midst of our

struggles we are transfigured. On his way to the cross Jesus has a metamorphosis, and on the way with Jesus we have metamorphoses. In Jesus' life of self-giving love God shines through, and when we let the Holy Spirit live and love through us God shines through us.

We pick up God's idiosyncrasies. The more we live in the Word and the Sacraments the more they shape us. The more time we spend with God the more we act like God's people in the world. God plants the faith of Christ in us and the Holy Spirit fills us. Friends of Christ, don't be ashamed of taking after God. Embrace it. Soak in the light of God that shines on us. Take on God's idiosyncrasies. Take after our father and be transfigured. Amen