



## Sermon for Feast of the Transfiguration, Aug 6, 2023

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Exodus 34:29-35](#) [Psalm 99:5-9](#) [2 Peter 1:13-21](#) [Luke 9:28-36](#)

Oh Jesus, help us to see you more clearly, follow you more nearly, and love you more dearly, today and every day, that we may know you as the lamp shining brightly in every dark place and scattering the darkness from before our paths, that the day may dawn and the morning star rise in your hearts. And may it shine forth in us, your beloved, each made in God's bright, eternal image. Amen.

Good morning, beloved people of God.

Today is a major feast day in the Church – the Feast of the Transfiguration. There are major feast days scattered throughout the year. We don't often mark them, as most times they fall on weekdays. Some of the bigger churches and cathedrals might have special services on those days, and in Catholic and Orthodox Churches some of them might be considered holy days of obligation when people are expected to go to a service. But these days mark important moments in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – like Christmas that marks his birth, and the Epiphany that marks his being revealed to all people of the world (when the wise men came), and his Baptism, and Palm Sunday marking his being hailed as king, and Maundy Thursday when he shared the last supper with his disciples and washed their feet, and Good Friday marking his death on the cross, and Holy Saturday marking his time in the death of the tomb, and Easter marking his rising from death, and Ascension Day marking his being taken into heaven. There are others through the year – like the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus on New Year's Day, and the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple in February, and the Feast of the Annunciation by the angel Gabriel to Mary about the birth of Jesus (nine months before Christmas Day), and the Transfiguration (today), and Holy Cross Day in September. Throughout the year, these days come up to remind us of important moments that in the life of Jesus that revealed who Jesus was and is, that were key moments of seeing Christ Jesus in the fullness of his being.

There are other major holy days as well throughout the year, that hold up for our attention the lives of people in scripture who were closest to Jesus – Mary his mother, Joseph his earthly adoptive father, Mary Magdalene, Peter and John and Paul and James and each of the Apostles, all Evangelists, all Apostles, all Angels. These days are given for us to remember and celebrate the lives of those who followed God's call in Christ, who were utterly transformed, who gave themselves in devotion to the Good News of God as they found in Christ Jesus.

These holy days come up in the calendar as punctuation for our year, even as we walk through seasons and scriptures step-by-step, even as our lives move forward through the worldly seasons of the revolutions of this earth around the sun, even as we live day after day.

Today, we are invited to ascend up the mountain with Jesus' closest disciples, to be present at a moment when the veil was lifted and Jesus' full nature shone through without limitation.

We are like Peter, James, and John – seeing as if for the first time, fully, the One to whom they have pledged their lives.

I'm inviting you today to sit in this moment of wonder, this moment of dazzling brightness. So, close your eyes. Let yourself remember a time in your life when everything was dazzlingly colorful, everything seemed to shine, everything seemed to leak out more color than you thought was possible. For me, there are places in the world where I have gotten to visit, like Butchart Gardens on Vancouver Island, and the gardens and forests and coastline of the Bay of Fundy, and fields and forests in Trinidad, and walks with comrades in the fields of Wales. But there are other moments for me that have been powerful in rich revelation of color and depth of light – like during my first drive across the Mississippi in the Midwest during a Spring Break, on a solo trip, and while listening to songs of faith and opening my heart to God's presence, it seemed like everything was infused with a new color I just hadn't seen before. I imagine that this is the Hindu festival of Holi, that festival of color splashed everywhere to immerse people in the sense of the overflowing love of on of their gods and the joy of new life in Spring.

What are those moments for you? When did fullness of light, color, life break forth for you in a way that you never imagined possible?

Now, take another moment, again with eyes closed, and remember the brightest light you ever saw. Maybe it was that moment of looking into the sun, even though your parents had told you not to, and then needing to close your eyes and blink hard – and then, you looked at the sky as close to the sun as you could, to feel the brightness filling your eyes and your insides – or, you kept your eyelids lightly closed but kept looking in the direction of the sun and let its rays flow through your eyelids to fill your eyes and mind and heart up with incredible light. Maybe it was as you lay on a beach or sat in a boat, with light all around, filling your vision whether your eyes were closed or open. Or was it a fire that you saw burning so brightly, white-hot?

What was it like for you, to be present in such light that was flowing into you, intruding into your senses?

Now, I invite you to think about when you saw a person or group of people that seemed to shine, or glow, or shimmer, with a light that was brighter than you had seen in them before. Like, how some say a performer might glow with a radiance of powerful energy and joy, like Simone Biles the gymnast seems to radiate as she returns to competition. Like, how we might say after a wedding how a bride was glowing and a groom was beaming, or how we might say of a mother after birth that there was a radiance to her after all the ordeal of giving birth was over and there was this new life placed in her arms. It may have been for you a time when you heard someone speak and share with you or with a whole group something that was incredibly powerful because of what it revealed of the person sharing, because of the power and freedom and fullness of voice and heart and body that shone forth in the person. It may have been in the way someone met and embraced you in a moment that dazzled you unexpectedly.

What was it like for you, to be in the presence of such light, such shimmering truth, such powerful energy, such joy, such profound love?

These are all little theophanies – little revelations of the fullness of God. Now, I ask you, were these moments of God breaking through? Or were these moments of actually waking up and seeing things as they always are?

I invite you to open your eyes again. Look around you. See this place. See the folks around you. See your own hands.

There is light here. There is light in this place. There is light in each one here. There is light in you, and me. God's ever-present, life-giving Holy Spirit infuses all things, flows through all things with awe-striking Light.

What if that light here in this place and in each of us shone and shimmered? What if it dazzled?

We cannot take such a steady gaze at the light, and we don't know what to do with it when we see it. It is gift beyond our readiness. Yet, we love it, and we desire it deeply.

Ours is not the same dazzling Light of the full, complete nature of God that was and is in Christ Jesus. This must have completely overwhelmed the three disciples, the friends who were on the mountain with him. Imagine, a vision of all eternity, of all suns moons and galaxies in the embrace of the One who is light and gives them all light. Imagine, a vision of all truth, unhindered and unhidden and unadulterated. Imagine a vision of all love that carries and yearns and celebrates and embraces all things. In this one who is fully God and fully human. The veil is lowered, and we see.

In the Friday church news, I included a meditation on an icon of the transfiguration of Christ. That icon, wonderfully lit, with Jesus on a mountain peak in the center in dazzling white and with Moses and Elijah on peaks close by looking in towards Jesus, and with lighting that shines directly on Jesus' clothing – that icon gives us an image of what it might have been like for those few disciples to see Jesus as he really was and is. Dazzlingly bright. Beyond our ability to perceive or hold all his light. This must have been like the light that appeared to Paul and blinded him on the road to Damascus, as he heard Jesus' voice call out to him.



Consider this true and full vision of Jesus Christ as he is so completely, unveiled. Let Christ's glorious, illuminating brightness surround you, flood your senses, and shine on you and through you, so that nothing is hidden from this great Light. As you meditate on this image, let yourself sink into these words from Paul's letter to the Colossians:

## **Colossians 1:15-20 – Jesus holds all creation and mends its rifts**

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

We cannot bear it long. We cannot absorb it all. We look away, and maybe we babble and go looking for something to do in response that seems good or worthy. And the voice of God comes back – “This is my Beloved. Listen!”

Now, what I appreciate about today’s alignment of scriptures for the Feast of the Transfiguration is that includes the story of Moses, who spoke directly with God and afterwards shone brightly from his face. Moses wasn’t Jesus. He was an ordinary person, just a guy that God called to do some stuff. And yet, after time in the presence of God, he came down the mountain, and his face shone so brightly that the people could not bear to look at him. So, he covered his face with a veil – but not until after he spoke the words that God had given him to bring to the people.

We cannot bear the direct brightness long, even if we yearn for it.

But we also don’t let the light that is in us show fully. There are a host of things that lower the veil.

- Not enough time – busy, busy, busy – here comes the next thing – I don’t have time to let down the veil
- Long habits that cast long shadows, over years – I am used to hiding or veiling myself, and have learned a reflex of not showing truly who and whose I am
- Messages of self-control or restraint from ourselves and others – “We don’t do such things,” “Don’t embarrass yourself,” “It’s unseemly,” “Who do you think you are?”

We know the messages. We know the habits.

Oh, friends, pray for release.

We are made in the image of God!

The Light of Christ shines in us.

Let us pray to be that light of a city on a hill, that yeast in the dough that affects everything around it, that great net that draws in all people and all things... Pray for release, pray that we may dare to lift the veil.

“You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19)