

The stained-glass window of the transfiguration of Jesus behind me is stunningly beautiful and wonderful to gaze upon, isn't it? It rightly depicts the glory of Christ, the light of the world, Lord and Savior, indeed worthy of praise, honor, and glory. Moses and Elijah pictured at Jesus' feet embody the posture of reverence and awe. Did you know what is pictured is only part of the story? Knowing the rest of the story, or what could be pictured below Moses and Elijah, helps to define why the transfiguration of Jesus is such a paramount revelation.

Raphael's exquisite painting *The Transfiguration* presents a chaotic scene at the bottom of the canvas. Stuck at the foot of the mountain, the disciples cannot cure the sick boy. Frustration is palpable in the outstretched arms and panicked faces of the crowd. In their midst, however, two figures point in the direction of the mountain, toward the sky, in which the transfigured Jesus shines, arrayed in white. This is the Jesus who will come down the mountain, bringing life and healing to the boy.

Jesus, in the fullness of God's glory, is the one in whom there is healing, resurrection, and sustaining power. Jesus is the savior, not only of this young boy, but of the whole world. The transfiguration of Jesus offers a glimpse of what is possible, not only for Jesus, but for all humanity. This is the good news of the gospel, for God is surely at work transfiguring the creation (world) now marked by suffering and death.

To highlight more of what the transfiguration of Jesus means for us today, namely that Jesus gives us a glimpse of possibility for how we can live our lives, here and now, transfigured, I would like to share several illustrations.

**The first illustration is a modern transfiguration story involving a church and how the glory of Christ breathed possibility and purpose into the life and ministries of the church when they were choosing to hide in fear.**

In Heidi Neumark's memoir *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx* she details the transformation of Transfiguration Lutheran Church, where she served for almost 20 years. The community surrounding the church was struggling, barely surviving when she arrived. Standing amid poverty and the myriad problems that can accompany such a demon- crime, drug abuse, lack of education and opportunity, lack of hope- Transfiguration mostly kept its doors shut tight to the world around it.

The work of Jesus rebuking the unclean spirit was example for Neumark. “When Peter and the others came down from the mountain,” she writes, “they found a father and a child gasping for life. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And they found transfiguration. And so it is. When the disciples of this Bronx church unlocked the doors of their private shelter and stepped out into the neighborhood, they did meet the distress of the community convulsed and mauled by poverty.... **But** they also discovered transfiguration as a congregation in connection with others.”

The story of the transfiguration of Jesus loses its power if it does not include that moment when Jesus and the disciples come down from that mountain. The transfigured Jesus is changed, not in essence, but in the way he is seen; he acts in and for the world accordingly. Seeing Jesus differently means seeing oneself and others differently too. The congregation at Transfiguration Church understood: “But living high up in the rarefied air isn’t the point of transfiguration... It was never meant as a private experience of spirituality removed from the public square. It was a vision to carry us down, a glimpse of unimagined possibility at ground level.”

- Lori Brandt Hale, FOTW

**The second illustration requires looking at the story of the disciples within the transfiguration story. What it reveals is that even those disciples in Jesus’ inner circle had important gaps in their Christian religious education. Professing faith in Christ is one thing, but living our Christian faith requires greater depth and breadth in our spiritual formation.**

“Though the disciples saw the transfiguration, their translation of this experience provided less than satisfactory results. They failed miserably in their efforts to bring healing and wholeness to a child. They could not bring reconciliation and peace between an anguished father and his only son. We could ask the following questions: Did they simply fail to grasp who Jesus is? Did they lack requisite trust in the power of God? Was their difficulty one of embodying the gospel of word, deed, and sign? We, as members of God’s church, could also despair at the disciples’ lack of success, even as we feel pressured by cultural measures of success such as membership size, church budget, breadth of programs, expansiveness of church property, as well as by the church’s status and influence in the public arena. Or instead, we can choose to be encouraged by the disciples’ faithfulness to be present with Jesus. Because while being formed in the presence of Christ at the glorious transfiguration event and thereafter, they became one with him and his mission in the world. We are to go and do likewise.”

- Jeffery Tribble, Sr., FOTW

The fullness of what it means to live Christian faith involves believing, trusting, and doing God's will. There is a mental dimension that undergirds belief. There is a relational dimension that forms us to have a trusting relationship with Jesus, nurturing relationships in a Christian community, and relationships of kindness and justice toward the whole human family. There is also a behavioral dimension that is an activity of doing God's will in the world. To embody this, we, as members of God's church, must look to Christ and listen to God, for it is Christ who gives us possibility to succeed. It is Christ who inspires us to more than we allow ourselves to dare or imagine.

Rather than the voice in the back of your head being one that says, "Hide. You can't. You don't have what it takes," Christ gives us the possibility of hearing, "One more step. You can do it. You are worth it. God's glory IS attainable for you through Christ."

For the remainder of our illustrations today, I want to shift from the Luke 9 text to the 2 Corinthians text. There is one verse in Paul's letter here that stands out I think: "When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed." (2 Cor. 3:16) The remainder of our illustrations about the transfiguration of Jesus teach us about the necessity of removing our proverbial veils in order to see the Glory of the Lord.

We, you and I, are not called to a life of bondage and blindness. As God's children, "We are called from lives of spiritual bondage and intellectual blindness to a new freedom, hope, and boldness as a result of the transfiguring encounter with "the Spirit of the Lord" that releases us from bondage and brings sight to our eyes. Hardened hearts are softened and blind eyes become sighted as the glory of God is revealed and lives are transformed into God's image."

- Donald Musser, FOTW

**The third illustration teaches us that the transfiguration of Jesus provides us a glimpse of possibility to a life without the proverbial veils in the way. Moses's veil is portrayed by Paul as a mask that hides what is glorious and good; therefore, one must remove the proverbial veil. If there is something preventing us from seeing the full truth about God, we must act with boldness to remove whatever that is.**

Idolatry is something that continues to consume many people. Sensual pleasure, material lust, and absorption in nature are some of the "veils" that prevent us from hearing, seeing, and acting in gospel ways. A music video for the song "Some People Change" by Montgomery-Gentry, reveals the transformation that can take place. In one verse, a young man, fated to hate by the racism of his family environment, was, "On the

road to nowhere fast, till the grace of God got in the way.” It was when the man “saw the light”, he became a “brand-new man”.

Chances are we all have a “veil.” It is likely that thing you don’t want anyone else to know about you. God knows and God cares. God can help embolden you to remove that veil and help you to become a brand-new you.

**The fourth illustration teaches us that the transfiguration of Jesus is a vehicle for bearing witness to life-changing experiences for any and every believer who encounters God. God loves all and believes in us all.**

A rehabilitation center in Daytona Beach, Florida, named for two recovering alcoholics: Leon Stewart, an attorney; and Hal Marchman, a pastor, was established on the reality of Christ’s transfiguration at work. As Leon and Hal were released from the shackles of addiction, they teamed with others to witness boldly to the hope of freedom from addiction for others. Marchman began to target substance abusers in the Hell’s Kitchen of the community. Myriads of people became unchained and enabled to reclaim their lives because of his bold and loving intervention into their lives. With tough love and the message of a transfiguring gospel, Marchman became a catalyst for lights turning on, for shackles breaking, for habits overcome, and for lives converted.

The transfiguration took place first in Marchman and then God used Marchman to empower others toward a similar transfiguration. A glimpse of possibility becomes a panorama of opportunity with God’s glory.

**The last illustration to consider today focuses on the power the transfiguration of Jesus has on cultural veils working to hide what is glorious and good in God’s sight. Our work as Christians is not to lose heart but to continue to act- no matter what the circumstances of life- with boldness in the direction of God’s redeeming work of love and mercy.**

There is a statue on the campus of Tuskegee University in Alabama, entitled *Lifting the Veil of Ignorance*. The statue is of Booker T. Washington, who founded Tuskegee University in 1881, standing over a slave and lifting a veil so that the light of education can strike his face. The slave, crouched down, has a book in one hand and is using the other hand to help lift the veil. His feet are poised to stand and move forward. The slave is looking out into the world with wide-eyed hope. The caption under the statue reads: “He lifted the veil of ignorance from his people and pointed the way to progress through education and industry.”

- Robert Warden Prim, FOTW

*(Pointing to the window)* In Christ, the veil of ignorance and death is being lifted so that humanity, we, might live in the truth of God's redeeming love and in the work of God's transforming Spirit.

Let all God's people say... Amen.