

March 5 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – The Transfiguration

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is the Transfiguration, located in the chancel of the sanctuary.

The chancel window is the most comprehensive and perhaps the most impressive of all the windows in our sanctuary. It combines the Old Testament teachings with those of the New Testament through depicting Christ, the central figure, with Moses on His right representing the law, Elijah representing the prophets on His left and the three disciples below - Peter, John and James witnessing the Transfiguration as told in Matthew 17:1-8. Symbols of the early church are shown in the arch above and in the side panels. The three circles in the arch contain symbols of the Trinity: the circle to the left shows the hand of God, the creator, superimposed on the triune, the triangular symbol representing the Trinity; the center circle is the sacrificial lamb representing Christ, and on the right, there is the descending dove signifying the Holy Ghost. The circle in the left side panel depicts a green cross representing eternal life. The gold represents the glory of God; the black signifies death and sorrow. The circle in the right side panel shows the Crown of Victory or the Crown of the Faithful representing the reward of God's faithful, who through self-denial and love will share God's glory. Hence, the crown of gold. The tree of life winds through the window with the oak leaves symbolizing strength. The entwined reeds represent Isaiah's prophecy: *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.* At the top of the window, we see rivers of living water flowing down from heaven, as written in Revelation 22:1-2: *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

The gold in Christ's robe and throughout the window represents the glory of God; His red sash represents his blood and sacrifice; His brown tunic represents His perfect obedience and humility even to death on a cross. Standing on Mount Tabor, we see Christ with the Holy Nimbus, encompassing a red cross signifying His blood and shrouded with purple signifying His kingship. The golden cloud above Christ's head is the Shekinah, signifying God the Father. Shekinah means "dwelling" and denotes the presence and glory of God as in the burning bush, the cloud that rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud hovering above the Mercy Seat in the Tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem. The crown within the cloud is reserved for Christ alone showing His kingship over all.

Peter, John and James comprised the inner circle of Jesus's disciples. The disciple shown on the left in blue could be John who was later tasked by Jesus at the cross to take care of Mary. Blue is typically Mary's color of hope, sincerity and piety. The disciple in the center could be Peter, shown wearing a gray-black tunic representing his sorrow in his future denial of Jesus. The disciple on the right could be James, wearing scarlet symbolizing his martyrdom - the first of the disciples to be killed for Christ's sake. All three disciples are shown each with a saintly nimbus, representing their sacrificial lives to Christ.

Elijah's robe is largely green, symbolic of eternal life in that he did not die but was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind as told in Scripture. His tunic is gold signifying the glory of God inherited through faith. Moses' tunic is brown, symbolic of his humility in obedience to God's commandments. His robe is gold signifying the glory that he inherited through faith.

The first three Gospels provide an account of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36); the Second Epistle of Peter recalls it (1 Peter 1:16–18); and the Gospel of John has a statement that alludes to it (John 1:14). In Mark 9, only days before Christ's spectacular transfiguration, we discover Jesus telling His followers that a day was fast approaching when He would come in His Father's glory to set up His promised kingdom. Christ added that some who were standing amongst them would not die until they had seen the Son of Man coming in the glory of His kingdom.

It was only the inner circle of His chosen apostles who witnessed Christ's transforming change. The radiance of His glory was witnessed by Peter, James, and John, when His face glowed with the brilliance of His glory, and His garments became as white as pure light. It was while the Lord Jesus was speaking with Moses and Elijah, who were conversing with Him about His fast approaching sacrificial death at Calvary and His own 'exodus' from this life into His resurrected glory, that: *"Suddenly a bright cloud covered them."* The astonished disciples then heard the voice of the Creator of heaven and earth: "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him. Listen to Him." Listen to Him and keep on listening to Him was God's heavenly direction to the three disciples, and it is His clear direction to us all.

Moses and Elijah standing beside Jesus symbolizes that Jesus is their successor, completely fulfilling both the Law and the Messianic prophecy. He is now bringing a new covenant from God for all people to hear and to understand. Augustine writes: *Here is the Lord, here the Law and the Prophets, but the Lord as the Lord: the Law is in Moses, Prophecy in Elijah, but they are only as servants, as ministers. They are as vessels; he as the fountain. Moses and the Prophets spoke, and wrote: but when they poured out, they were filled from him.*

Moses, the most important Jewish prophet, is credited with writing the Torah and with leading the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. In one of Moses' final speeches, he gave this Messianic prophecy: *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him"* (Deuteronomy 18:15). Commentary notes that Jesus and Moses parallel in numerous ways. Moses was both a prophet and a lawgiver as was Jesus. Jesus was widely recognized as a prophet who spoke the Word of God, giving commandments for His followers to obey. Both mediated a covenant between God and men—Moses the Old Covenant and Jesus the New. Moses was the (adopted) son of a king, and Jesus is the Son of the Most High. Moses spent forty years as a shepherd, and Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Moses and Jesus were alike in that they both led God's people out of captivity. With great power, Moses led the Israelites out of physical bondage and slavery in Egypt, and Jesus, with even greater power, led God's elect out of spiritual bondage and slavery to sin. Moses was also like Jesus in that he performed miracles - not all prophets did. Several of the miracles of Moses bear a resemblance to Jesus' miracles, most notably the provision of bread in the wilderness, which is comparable to Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. In fact, after Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes, the people's thoughts went immediately to Moses' prophecy: *After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world'.* When Moses stood in God's presence, his face shone with a heavenly glory and had to be covered with a veil, which reminds us of Jesus' Transfiguration, when *"His face shone like the sun."* Moses constantly interceded for his people. When the Israelites sinned, Moses was always standing by, ready to petition God on their behalf and plead for their forgiveness. After the blatant idolatry at the foot of Mt. Sinai involving the golden calf, Moses interceded twice for the people. While Moses' intercession was temporary, our Lord's is everlasting. Jesus is right now *"at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us"* and *"always lives to intercede"* for us. Moses, like Jesus, was willing to die for his people - he offered his life in exchange for sinners. *"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends,"* Jesus said, and Jesus proved His love when He *"laid down his life for us."*

Elijah, meaning “Jehovah is my God,” was a great prophet of the Old Testament known for defending the worship of God and performing miracles in God's name. With low self-esteem and depressed to the point of death, God spoke to him and reminded him of whose he was. God performed many miracles through Elijah, including the resurrection of the widow's son, and bringing fire down from the sky in front of all of the Baal prophets. In one of his final prophetic acts, God sent Elijah to warn Jezebel's husband, King Ahab, of certain destruction, and Elijah obeyed. Because of his humility upon hearing the words of God's prophet Elijah, destruction did not befall Ahab. The Book of Malachi prophesies about Elijah receiving the grand honor of accompanying the Messiah when He comes to reign as King in His Messianic Kingdom on earth.

John Wesley speaks of the purpose of the Transfiguration: *“Moses, the giver of the law, Elijah, the most zealous of all the prophets, and God speaking from heaven, all bore witness to him.”* The Transfiguration is an *“extraordinary manifestation of the identity of the Son of God incarnate ... a testimony to his divine and cosmic status and an exemplary promise of their glorious destiny to those who find their life in him.”* Wesley notes that witness or testimony comes with the Transfiguration, whereby Moses and Elijah assist in making the nature of Jesus known to the disciples, and they in turn share it with the world.

Just prior to Jesus' Ascension is His final and ultimate teaching that brought full clarity and understanding for the disciples in who Jesus was and for what purpose He came. In *Luke 24:44-45: He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*

Peter testified firsthand with full understanding to the Transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16-17: *For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, ‘This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy’.*

In John 1:14, when John said, *“We beheld His glory,”* he was giving eyewitness testimony to the incarnation—that God Himself had come to earth embodied in the Son: *We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. (1 John 1:1)*

Not only John, but all the disciples had seen Jesus and beheld His glory with their own eyes. These apostles could all *testify that the Father had sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14)*. The teachings of John and the other disciples were trustworthy because these men had firsthand experience hearing, seeing, and touching Jesus (*John 19:35*).

As with the disciples, we are believers and followers of our Lord Jesus. Where have we seen His glory and given witness to Him?

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(79\) Third day- King of Glory - YouTube](#)

Looking ahead – Sunday March 12

Chancel Window – Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane