

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen*

Y'know, the Transfiguration is one of those Bible stories which I think I should be able to re-tell for you in some clever way, so that it makes more sense somehow. But, truthfully, it is such a strange story that it nearly evades any crafty interpretation. Strange as the whole story seems, the Gospel writers insist that it happened and that we should absolutely know about it. Strange as it seems, it is somehow vital to the whole Jesus event, and should be remembered in a special way, like Christmas, with it's own specific day on the Christian calendar. I think, strange as it is, this story is about formation. Not just information, but formation. Though we're not told what is going on in Jesus' mind, Jesus apparently knows what is about to happen and invites the three disciples, the original fishermen, along to see for themselves. As part of their formation as disciples and leaders of the church, they need to experience what is about to happen for themselves. It wouldn't be enough for them to just be given the information, they will need to see the event and absorb its content and let it form them into what they will become.

Jesus is not just flesh and blood, they find out, but is visibly full of God's Spirit. So much so, that with the eyes of their hearts they see him blazing in glory, his face glowing and transfigured into a representation of God's own glory, as if they were coming face-to-face with God. As Jesus consults with the Bible heroes Moses and Elijah, the three witnesses are awestruck and, no doubt, full of questions. It is these questions, I think, which will shape their lives going forward, and add to their formation. The sight of divinity will shock them into inquiry, and that willingness to see beyond and behind the usual landscape will make them useful members of the church, the Body of Christ, when the time is right. The story is told and frequently repeated, I think, because of the questions it promotes: Who is Jesus, really? How are Moses and Elijah complicit in his resurrection? What does it mean to be God's chosen Son? Why does God's voice always seem to come from some random cloud? Why are the witnesses reluctant to tell the other disciples about what they have personally experienced? Could something like this become part of my personal experience, too?

Fact is, we don't need detailed answers to these questions. What we more likely need is for those questions to help shape our own lives, to assist us in our formation. No one likes a know-it-all, either in the backseat or the pulpit, but everyone can appreciate a well-formed character, one whose quiet wisdom comes from a full life of living the eternal questions with grace and confidence and hope. Such disciples would be ready to lead the church. Such characters would be ready to live fruitful lives. So Jesus exposes his followers to the eternal questions, through miracles and marvels and events like the Transfiguration not to share information, but to inform their formation, and the gospel stories are told and retold, and are meant not to be memorized, but to be experienced. And I would dare you to add the experiences of your own lives to the gospel record, sharing the good news of your own faith when the time is right, sharing the questions you are living and hearing those of others.

Somewhere behind or beneath or beyond those questions divinity waits to be discovered, experienced, and explored.

I'd like you to hear again what Peter has to say about this after living such a life of exploring the questions: "I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. 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."

So, what does all this have to do with young Ryan and his family? Speaking as a know-it-all who helped raise five children, I can tell you that fruitful wisdom grows better on the vine of formation than one of simple information. We have all made promises before God this morning to do what we can to assist in the formation of this young mind and body. And for no other reason than that, as a child of God, he deserves it. His soul, we know, is beloved; behind all the noise of the world, we can hear God assuring us of that when we listen with the ears of our hearts. We pray that he will seldom be dismayed or discouraged or overwhelmed by the eternal questions, but will find that as he lives with those questions, his life will be formed with a confident wisdom, and that the presence of divinity will reassure him. May he see behind the veil, beneath the surface, and beyond the irritating noise of faithless distractions. And may we all attend not only to his physical needs, but also to his spiritual ones, encouraging him to be, as Peter advises, attentive to the lamp shining in a dark place while waiting patiently for the dawning of each day in his heart.

Today we do something for Ryan which we believe pleases God, and Jesus has specifically invited us to join him at the top of this mountain to share in the majesty of this moment. (the baptism begins...)