

**Sermon for February 26, 2017 (Last Epiphany, Year A)  
Offered by Nathan Ferrell at The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary**

Texts: Exodus 24:9-18; Psalm ; Matthew 17:1-9

Know what:

So what:

Now what:

Title:

One day, the village drunk was walking down main street with horrible red blisters clearly visible on both of his ears. A friend came up and asked him what happened to cause such painful looking sores.

He said, "Ah, my wife left her hot iron on, and when the phone rang I picked up the iron by mistake!"

"Ouch, brother, that's horrible," his friend replied. "But what about the other ear?"

"Well, the darned fool called back!"

This is Transfiguration Sunday, my friends. It's the Last Sunday before Lent, and this Sunday is all about change, all about how God calls us continually to change, to transformation, to transfiguration.

"And Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white" (Matthew 17:2).

Just before we launch into Lent, we stop every year to remember one of the great moments of revelation in the life of Jesus.

You may recall that in the Eastern churches this Feast is known in Greek as the Metamorphosis. That's an even stronger word to signify the kind of change which the apostles witnessed on the mountaintop with the Lord.

Now, if we are honest, change is a difficult thing for ALL of us on a personal level.

Here is the paradox of our human condition.

I don't think I've ever met someone who did not want to be accepted just the way that they are, while at the same time also wanting to be changed, to be different in a number of ways.

Isn't this right? You are who you are. I am who I am. Take me as I am.  
Don't expect me to change or to be someone different than what you see.  
BUT at the very same time, I could easily give you a list of things that I would like to change about myself.

This is the dilemma of our human life.  
The good news is that God does indeed accept us – and love us – just as we are, while also calling us – and empowering us – to change.

Let's go back to the Gospel text and look at this story in more detail.  
"Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus."  
Why Moses and Elijah? Why those two standing with the Lord on the mountaintop?

Well, you may remember what we heard in the Sermon on the Mount just a few weeks ago, when Jesus said that he had come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17-20).

Moses is the Law-giver. Through him, God gave the Torah to the Israelites.  
Elijah is the pre-eminent prophet in the history of Israel. In June and July, we spent time reading through the stories of his life.

Together, these two are the embodiment of the Law and the Prophets.  
By standing with and talking with Jesus, the Gospel wants to show that Jesus is the one who truly understands the Hebrew Scriptures and how to interpret them.

But there is also an experiential reason for Moses and Elijah to be there on the mount of transfiguration. Both of them went up the mountain to meet with the Lord. Both of them heard the voice of God speak clearly on the mountain.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain and into the cloud to hear the voice of God. They are following the same well-established pattern

But let's be clear about this part as well: Peter and James and John did not ask for this experience. They did not go looking for it!  
No, they were chosen. This gift of divine vision was given to them, whether they wanted it or not.

But what these apostles DID do correctly was to put themselves in the situation where such an experience of God was likely to happen.

By following the Lord Jesus, by listening to him, by walking the roads with him, they put themselves in a prime position to hear the voice of God when it came thundering through the clouds.

Perhaps that is the best that we can do, as well.

We can never force God to speak to us like on those mountains. We cannot demand that God give us a special experience to confirm our faith, to take away our doubts.

God will do what God will do, and we are NOT in control.

But what we CAN do is put ourselves in the right situations where God is likely to speak. Spiritually, we can climb the mountain.

In truth, this is the same as with any other relationship that you might have in life. You cannot force deep, memorable moments to happen.

Have you ever tried this? Have you ever decided – usually in a unilateral way – that THIS vacation, or THIS holiday, or THIS birthday - or whatever the occasion might be – that THIS was going to be the BEST ever? And that you and those around you were going to bond together and make lasting memories?

Well, if you have tried this, then you probably know that the people around you hated it! The others probably rolled their eyes and sighed.  
Very few people enjoy being forced into creating memorable moments.

You know why, right? Because these things just happen. Memories happen by serendipity. They happen by spending time together.  
When you spend time together, things happen and THEN memories are created. This process can't be forced. It happens just by being together.

It's the same process in your relationship with God.

In Exodus, the LORD speaks to Moses and says, "Come up to me on the mountain and BE there." Our text says "wait there", but the Hebrew simply says to BE there.

And Moses was there for 40 days and 40 nights.

Not doing anything. Just being with God on the mountain.

Lent is coming in just a few days, but, as you know, there is no magic about Lent.

The importance of the season is found in our intention.

The Church gives us Lent as a time to focus on our relationship with God.

40 days is long enough to change bad habits and start new ones, but not SO long as to be overly grueling!

Most people speak of what they will give up for Lent. That's fine, I suppose.

Life would be better if we all did more fasting, and giving things up for Lent is a form of fasting.

But why not try something new for Lent? Why not try a new practice that will increase the time that you spend with God? A practice that will enable you simply to BE in God's presence, like Moses was on the mountain?

That's the goal of the BE STILL hour here on Monday nights. It's time, in the Chapel next door, just to BE in God's presence. With intention.

Transfiguration is about change. Lent is about change. We ALL want to be changed in various ways, but how does positive change actually happen in our lives?

As the great Dallas Willard explained, there needs to be 3 basic things:

**Vision. Intention. Means.** VIM. V – I – M.

First, you need to see and be aware of the GAP between where your life is now and where it could be. You need to be inspired by a vision of what's possible.

Out of this awareness, you must develop a clear intention. A goal. A clear and specific intention to get from point A to point B.

And lastly, you need some practical means by which to get there!

You need specific disciplines which will enable the change to take place.

Why not allow this coming season of Lent to be a time when you take up a new discipline of spending intentional time with God? A new way in which you will be open to hear the voice of God and to be changed by the word of God?

The voice of God spoke on the mountain and repeated what had been spoken at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.

“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well-pleased” (Matt. 17:5).

But to that familiar sentence, something is added this time.

Three simple words. “Listen to him.”

Not follow him. Not think about him. Not even love him. But, just...listen to him.

Listen to his words and his teaching, for here you will find LIFE.

True life that transcends all of the noise and anxiety of the world.

If we keep walking with Jesus and keep listening to him, then we WILL be changed. It's gonna happen – not necessarily when and how we want it, but it will happen.

Lent will lead us on a journey to the cross, to the passion of Christ. It's not an easy journey, for there's no mistaking where we're headed.

Peter, James and John went back down the mountain with Jesus. They did not stay up there. They went back to work. And they headed off to Jerusalem.

My friends, God wants to transform us, to change us – not so that we can enjoy a beautiful life somewhere off by ourselves, but so that we can go back and be part of God's transforming work in all of humanity.

Why you listen to Jesus? Will you spend time with God and listen for the voice of God? Will you allow yourself to be changed as God desires?

May it always be so among us. Amen.