

Transfiguration B, 2009

Text: 2 Corinthians 3:12 – 4:6

Title: The Spirit Transforms

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Anniversaries begin by looking back. Last week we saw how Christ has had compassion on us in this place for over 50 years. He has touched us with His Word, with His body and His blood and brought us healing, making us instruments of His compassion.

But anniversaries don't stop there. This isn't just a time to look back fondly on our past. Our past is important to us. But there's much more going on here every week than remembering the past.

Some people get the idea that church is only about the past. We talk about things that happened long ago. We hear stories about Abraham and Moses and David in the Old Testament, and we hear stories about Jesus and the disciples in the New. We come to hear about all these things that happened many years ago. And as we learn about the past, we learn lessons that are still true today.

For many folks, church is a glorified history class. We come to learn and to remember. And so if we already know all the stories, or at least the big ones, then what's the point in coming back? I know God created the world, I know Jesus lived, died and rose for me. Isn't that good enough? What more is there?

Now the past is important, and we start by hearing about what God has done. But it doesn't stop there.

We are not here just to hear about the past, to learn what God did thousands of years ago.

We are here because God is active here and now. God is making history right here, this very morning.

Take today's gospel lesson. We are not here just to hear about Jesus' transfiguration a long time ago in a land far, far away. Most of you already know the story, and if you didn't, you could easily read about it at home.

We are here because this is where Jesus comes to be among us today. This is where He is present, and this is where we see His glory.

In our opening hymn, we sang, "How Good, Lord, to Be Here." We didn't sing, "How Good, Lord, to Be There." No, "How good, Lord, to be here."

There's no way for us to go back in time two thousand years to the mount of Transfiguration.

And so Jesus comes here. He is here with us now, along with Moses and Elijah, Peter, James, and John, with His holy angels and with all the company of heaven, with Rosemary, Leroy, Howie, Sara, Luther, Thure, Jane, Thomas, Leslie, Elmer, Ed, John, Albert, Ervin, Robert, Charles, Carolyn, and all those who have died and are with Christ. They are all here with us now, because they are with Jesus, and Jesus is here.

Jesus comes here today with His Spirit to change you, to transform you, to make you like Him.

When Moses saw the Lord on Mt. Sinai, he was changed. His face glowed so brightly that it hurt to look at him. Moses didn't even realize it, but he had been changed from his experience of talking with the Lord.

You are changed, you are transformed every time you meet the Lord here. When you hear the Lord's words, those words bear His Spirit. The Spirit gets inside of you, in through your ears. The Spirit of the Lord is living and active. He comes into you to change you.

St. Paul writes, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

Let's work backwards through this text. It's a little tricky, but you're smart folks and I'm sure that you can handle it. There are three things that St. Paul says, all packed into this one sentence.

1. The Spirit is the Lord
2. The Spirit transforms us into God's likeness
3. We reflect the Lord's glory

St. Paul clearly confesses that the Holy Spirit is the Lord.

We don't talk much about the Holy Spirit in the Lutheran Church, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. The Holy Spirit's job is to point us to Jesus, to talk about Jesus to us, to create faith in us to believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the light that's been illuminating Christ this whole transfiguration Sunday. You don't go to an art gallery and spend all your time looking at the light bulbs. They are there so that you can see the artwork. Similarly, the Holy Spirit's job is to illuminate Christ.

But we still confess every Sunday in the creed that the Holy Spirit is God, just as the Father and the Son are God. Three persons, one God.

In that last article of the creed we just confessed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

These are not six unrelated things. This is not just the leftovers once we've confessed God the Father and the Son. All these things go together.

The Holy Spirit is the one who makes you holy. He does this here, in the church as He forgives your sins. Because the Holy Spirit forgives you, makes you holy, He makes you a part of the communion of the saints. He will raise you on the last day and give you everlasting life, because your sins are forgiven. Only God could pull something like this off, with a group like us.

All these things all go together- Holy Spirit, Church, forgiveness, resurrection and life. The church is where God's word is spoken. The church is where you get your sins forgiven.

You've probably heard people tell you that you need to forgive yourself. That's impossible. You can't forgive yourself. Only God can forgive sins, and this is where He forgives sins. This is where His minister, His representative, speaks His word and gives out His forgiveness.

So that's point number one. The Holy Spirit is God.

Point number two- the Holy Spirit transforms you.

The Lord forgives you, but that's not all He does with you. St. Paul says that His Spirit transforms you. He changes you. The Greek word here is metamorphosis. This is word we use when a caterpillar is changed into a butterfly. It's miraculous, it's noticeable.

St. Paul says that the Spirit changes you according to the likeness (or image) of God. We were created in God's likeness. That likeness was damaged by sin, but here the Spirit works to restore the image of God in us.

When the Holy Spirit changes us, He makes us like Jesus. He recreates us as obedient children, selfless, loving and caring.

The change is not complete, however, and so that's why we come back week after week, for the Holy Spirit to continue His work on us.

The Lord loves you in spite of our fault and flaws. And He loves you so much that He doesn't leave you the way you are. He comes to change you, to make you more like Himself, to make you the person you were meant to be. He doesn't get rid of your personality or your uniqueness, but He perfects everything about you.

You leave this place different than when you walked in the door. And it's not about getting a little smarter, learning a few more things about God. It's about God changing you, transforming you to make you like Him.

So the Holy Spirit is God, the Holy Spirit transforms you to be like God.

And now, as St. Paul says, we reflect the glory of the Lord.

It's a reflection. It doesn't come from us. On our own, there is nothing good or glorious in us. But it all comes from the Lord.

The glory of the Lord is what appeared as the pillar of cloud and fire that led the Israelites through the wilderness. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle and the temple when the Lord dwelled there with His people. The glory of the Lord came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

The glory of the Lord looks like an out-of-this world brightness. The kind of light that only comes from the creator of light. The light that kept the Israelites from looking Moses in the eye. The light that shone round about the angels and made the shepherds sore afraid. The kind of light that is brighter than any bleached laundry. The glory of God is the dazzling brilliance that was hidden in the cloud for the Israelites, it was hidden in Jesus flesh, and it is hidden now in bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

We are like mirrors that reflect the glory of the Lord. As long as we are here, in His presence, we receive His glory. We are exposed to His glory. And when we leave this place, we reflect that glory to the world around us.

Jesus is not done with this world, yet. There are still folks who need to be changed, and made to be like Himself. And He's going to do that through us, the church. He changes us, He transforms us, He transfigures us, He fills you with His glory, so that other folks are transformed as well.

This world is messed up. We all know that. It needs to be transformed to be the way the Lord created it to be. That change will be completed on the last day, but the Lord has already begun now. He started with you and me, giving us new birth in Holy Baptism. It's been going on for generations, and will continue for generations until the Lord returns.

The Lord has brought you here this morning not only to hear about what He's done in the past, not just to hear about His transfiguration so many years ago, but by His Spirit to change you, to transform you, to transfigure you and make you like Jesus. The Spirit will use you to reflect God's glory into a dark and gloomy world. You are light of the world.

That's what the Lord is doing right here, right now, Transfiguration Sunday 2009. Come back next week to hear what the Lord has in store for us in generations to come.