

I read a brilliant idea this week. We should train all Amazon delivery drivers to give the vaccine. The whole population would be immunized by Saturday. Thursday if you've got Prime. *** Also read that one day 2020 will be the one-word Catch-Phrase for everything totally messed up. "How's your day?", "a total 2020." Say no more. ***Who would've ever thought one day we'd be smoking weed at a family gathering, but the illegal part would be the family gathering." And finally, from the news: BBC BREAKING NEWS HEADLINE: MAN SHOT 200 TIMES WITH UPHOLSTERY GUN. Surgeons reveal he is now 'fully recovered.'

First, some background on this gospel. The Transfiguration of Jesus is a wonderful and many-layered event. It has been variously interpreted -- as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus projected back into the period of His ministry, an expression of the faith and/or Christology of the early Church, and a vision. If this moment in Jesus' life is understood as a vision, as the Synoptics -- Matthew, Mark and Luke -- seem to imply, then it is, indeed, a powerful one, charged with meaning and profound consequences. It has been compared to Isaiah's vision in the Holy of Holies (Is 6), and to Paul's vision of the risen Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 9). In each case, the vision caused both wonder and confusion -- but also resolved doubts and gave the person a sense of power and purpose.

While we just heard Mark's rather spare account, Luke offers the most detail about the experience. And while all the Synoptics mention Moses and Elijah, who represent the Law and the Prophets, only Luke tells us the subject of their conversation with Jesus. Namely, that they spoke of Jesus' departure -- His passion, death, and resurrection -- which gives the meaning of the Transfiguration.

One week earlier, as each of the synoptics recounts, Jesus had predicted His passion, death and resurrection and affirmed the fact that His followers would experience a similar path, through suffering into glory. The week between these predictions and the Transfiguration must have been filled with tension. Never before had suffering, rejection and humiliation been applied to the expected Messiah. This has been called "the most original and daring of all the characteristic features of the teaching of Jesus" (H. Wheeler Robinson (REDEMPTION AND REVELATION), and one that "struck the disciples with the force of a solid fueled rocket." (C.Milo Connick, in JESUS, THE MAN, THE MISSION, AND THE MESSAGE) It confronted them with a difficult choice. Whom would they believe, the scriptures that assured them of a triumphant, kingly messiah or Jesus -- whose radical notions were not only shocking but also hugely disappointing? This dilemma must have laid heavily upon the disciples for a week; then came the vision of the transfigured Jesus and the sworn witness of both Moses and Elijah that Jesus' departure soon to be accomplished in Jerusalem was part of God's foreordained plan. As if to affirm the 2 witnesses (Moses and Elijah), the voice from the cloud verified the vision: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him."

The vision assured the disciples that the Cross would not be the end of the story -- nor the end of Jesus. Nor would death be the defining end of any believer. Jesus would live again, fully and forever; so also will believers live, and in their believing, make His way, purpose, teaching and vision their own. (all adapted from Patricia Sanchez, PREACHING RESOURCES, March 2007)

Second, OK, so what in the world does all of this have to do with us? Well, transfiguration, and transfiguring, is going on around us all the time -- if we are at all attentive to prayer. For example, we faithfully go to church for years. We hear the same stories and sing the same hymns and recite the same

creed. It is easy for us to become sleepy and dull. But then every now and then it HAPPENS. All of a sudden, the dullness breaks away, if only for an instant, and our faith is transfigured. And we know the joy and peace of a faith realized, a faith fulfilled, a faith that transforms our life from where it is to where it OUGHT to be.

Some of you have commented about the way I always conclude the Prayers of the Faithful with the fact that God has given us infinitely more than we could ask for – or even imagine. It's actually the reading in Evening Prayer in the Breviary (Eph 3:21-22), the prayer that every priest and religious promises to pray every day. It occurs once in the 4 weeks – on Wednesday, week 3. I had probably prayed this passage for over 20 years – and then one day, it just happened – the passage seemed to leap off the page at me, and I thought: "This is the truth – this is the way God is in our lives – infinitely more than we could ask for -- or even imagine." And shortly thereafter, we had a wonderful Religious Sister, Kathleen Hughes, giving a workshop on presiding, and she made the suggestion of using that passage for the closing prayer – and that's how it happened. A simple – but for me, a very profound, experience of God's love for us, and perhaps a reminder to all of us of how good God is to us.

In one of the chapels in London's Westminster Cathedral, there is a beautiful mosaic depicting the miracle at Cana where Jesus changed water into wine. In the mosaic, a man is pouring water from one jug into another. The water pouring out of the first jug is a radiant beautiful blue. But as it nears the mouth of the second jug, it becomes a deep shade of purple. As you look at the mosaic, you get the feeling that water is being turned into wine right before your very eyes. Author Jim Forest has written that until he had seen the mosaic, it had never occurred to him that this first miraculous sign of Jesus – a miracle of transformation – is a KEY to understanding everything in the Gospel. "Jesus is constantly involved in transformation: water into wine, blind eyes to seeing eyes, withered limbs to working limbs, guilt into forgiveness, sorrow into joy, crucifixion into resurrection, death into life." (taken from James F. Colaianni, sr. Editor, in SUNDAY SERMONS, Jan-Mar 2008)

Third, it is critical to note that the Transfiguration experience happens because Jesus prayed. He was in touch with a deeper reality than what appears on the surface. He had come to know in His prayer that He was, in fact, the beloved Son of God. And that made His inside reality come out and touch others throughout His life. But this reality is going on all the time, but perhaps we are missing it. Dr. William Stidger tells of a 90-year-old lady named Mrs. Sampson. Mrs. Sampson was frail, feeble, even sickly. But Dr. Stidger said that when he was discouraged, he always went to visit Mrs. Sampson. She had a radiant spirit that was contagious, and always lifted him up. One day he asked her "What is the secret of your power? What keeps you happy, contented and cheerful through your sickness?" She answered with a line from a poem, "I had an hour of glory on a windswept hill." He said "I knew she had been in touch with God – and that was the whole reason for her cheerfulness." That woman's prayer – her inside – came out and touched others. That's the way Transfiguration works. I love the line: "An hour of glory on a windswept hill." It sounds very much like the experience of Jesus, Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Sometimes we refer to special events in our life as a 'mountaintop experience.' Here are three examples, which perhaps will help us to realize that God is at work doing these kinds of transfigurations every day – people's inside goodness coming out and touching others.

Ryan is a great kid – but not a particularly well-organized or coordinated one. Ryan's balance and agility haven't kept up with his growth spurts – he loses things, he trips over things (often himself), he forgets things, he puts things off to the last minute. But put Ryan on stage, and he changes from a gangly teenager into first-rate actor. No matter the role, Ryan can always find what makes that character click and bring that character to life before an audience's eyes. Ryan's performances are nothing less than transfigurations.

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Miriam pretty much stays to herself at the nursing home. She's kind and pleasant, seldom complains; she makes the best of her fragile health and the isolation that creeps in as your family and friends go to God. Until 3 pm every afternoon. That's when she struggles to the community room and sits down at the piano. And for the next hour Miriam plays with the heart and skill of the concert pianist she once was and the musician she will always be. A typical afternoon concert might include a bit of Beethoven and Liszt, Sondheim and Jerry Herman, Lennon-McCartney and Beyonce; she will slip into jazz and then suddenly change it up with a country riff. There might even be a surprise, like a medley from HAMILTON. To fully appreciate Miriam's artistry, you have to watch her play. You can see her face and pose that the music comes from something deep inside her that comes to light when her fingers begin to dance across the keys. Her music is an experience of transfiguration.

Bruce is as hard a boss as they come. He built his construction company one house at a time – now he's one of the most in-demand contractors in the area. Bruce is all business on the construction site; he never cuts corners and never misses a deadline – and he expects the same from his crew. That's Bruce the construction boss – then there's Bruce the loving grandfather to 5-year-old Jeff. Jeff is autistic and can be a handful. But Jeff's struggles bring out a gentleness and kindness in Bruce that's seldom seen at a construction site. Bruce always has time for Jeff, has infinite patience during those tough stretches, and knows exactly how to connect with his grandson. Bruce and Jeff's relationship is transfiguring for both of them.

All are experiences of transfiguration; when that sense of beauty and empathy and grace that exists within them comes to the surface in love, in compassion, in generosity – when we see these transformed individuals in their 'glory.' In the event recounted in today's Gospel, Peter, James and John see in Jesus the very life and love of God that dwelled within Him. This Lenten season challenges us to discover within ourselves that same kind of transfiguring love that calls us beyond our own needs and wants. The Transfiguration says that we need to allow God's love within us to transfigure, in our own lives, despair into hope, sadness into joy, anguish into healing, estrangement into community. A power we all have access to if we are but willing to spend some time on a wind-swept hill. (Last part adapted from CONNECTIONS, Feb 14, 2021) Let the Church say Amen.