

St Thomas's Episcopal Church
Sermon - Tenth Sunday After Pentecost
06 August 2023
Reference: Luke 9:28-36

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our God, our Redeemer, and Friend. Amen

Today we come to another pivotal moment in the life of Jesus, the Transfiguration. The word “Transfigure” is a synonym for “Metamorphosis.” This word is used to explain a caterpillar becoming a beautiful butterfly.

To give you a backdrop of the story of Transfiguration, Chapter 9 of the book of Luke is where the story of Transfiguration appears. There are several stories in this chapter of Luke; first is Jesus sending out the 12 to heal the sick and cast off demons; the next is Herod thinking that John the Baptist had come back to life. Then comes Jesus feeding the five thousand. Before the transfiguration story, Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do the people say I am? Satan could have tempted Jesus with self-doubt.

Jesus would have been exhausted and disappointed. There was so much to teach his disciples, who were slow to understand. Jesus being human, would have needed encouragement. We need to remember that God understands our sadness and discouragement.

In today's Gospel, we read that Jesus took three disciples and went up the high mountain (Mount Tabor) to pray. Here Jesus was transfigured. Jesus met with Moses, the giver of Jewish Law, and Elijah, the fulfillment of the Jewish Prophets—two great patriarchs in the Biblical Old Testament.

Jesus needed encouragement at this pivotal moment of his life; who other than Moses and Elijah were the best people to comfort and encourage Jesus in his moment of need.?

I believe their subject that night was the incredible human journey Jesus would travel toward Jerusalem and his crucifixion on the cross.

This was the most incredible rescue operation ever envisaged and carried out in history. Jesus – God becoming human to save humankind.

A far more significant and magnificent exodus than Moses leading people out of Egypt.

Salvation for all humankind, for all time, was to deliver humanity from Sin, Satan, and Death.

The picture in your Bulletin is Raphael's climatic artistic creation, painted just before he died in 1520 - The Transfiguration of Christ.

Show/Point to the Bulletin Cover Picture

This artistic composition is divided into two distinct parts.

The upper part of the painting depicts Christ elevated in front of billowing, illuminated clouds, and on either side are the prophets Elijah and Moses.

In the lower portion of the painting, the Apostles are depicted trying unsuccessfully to rid the possessed boy of demons (sick epileptic boy).

On the most obvious level, the painting can be interpreted as the split between the flaws of men, depicted in the lower half, and the redemptive power of Christ, in the upper half of the painting.

Two figures are kneeling to the left of Christ, the martyrs, Saint Agapitus and Saint Felicissimus (two of the six deacons of Pope Sixtus II who were martyred with him on or about 6 August 258). They were seized during the persecutions of Emperor Valerian.

The question we would ask is - Why were Moses and Elijah there? And not King David, King Solomon, or Abraham?

It is because Moses as representative of the law, and Elijah as a representative of the prophets, were confirming that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets and was ushering in a new era.

They were as if it was stepping aside and giving Jesus a guard of honor.

But most of all, we believe they were there to encourage, affirm and strengthen Jesus.

What a holy conversation they would have had. Moses, the lawgiver so grateful that he could put his feet on the promised land. Elijah, the 1st of the canonical prophets. Luke in the Gospel says they were speaking about his departure and the crucifixion Jesus would suffer.

As we study the lives of Moses and Elijah. Both knew loneliness. Both men of prayer and mountain men knew rejection by their people.

God often brings us into people's lives because we have experience and the capacity to help and listen. Let us be alert and prepare for those moments to support others in need.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, God the Father spoke out of the cloud, words of encouragement.

“This is my Beloved Son, “Listen to Him! Hear Him!

God calls us to listen to Jesus and His words of Love and hope.

As the Raphael painting shows us, after our mountaintop experience, we need to go down to live our daily lives and engage in challenges and difficulties in this world. As we see in Raphael's paintings, our daily lives are a contrast light and darkness.

Yet when we come down the mountain daily, we struggle with confusion, temptation, and earthly concerns. Many times we fail in our striving to love and serve those around us.

True strength and encouragement can only come from God.

God protects and guides us and uses us to strengthen and encourage others. As the prophet Micah says, God wants us to “Act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 8:6).

As we leave church and zoom today, remember that we are all one in Christ, a community of faith, people who need each other. **Amen.**