

The Feast of the Transfiguration at SMEC 10:30 2/23/200 “On Being Dazzled, Discipled and Delivered”

To God be the Glory. AMEN+ The great Russian novelist, Dostoevsky once said, of his own faith, “I have believed, and I want to see for myself. I want to be there when everyone suddenly finds out what it was all for.”

For the story we witness today is not just in seeing Jesus’ transfigured today, on a hill faraway. It’s the story of seeing Him transfigure us, right here in our hearts. Today, Jesus takes us with him, on the long climb, as He took Peter, James and John, all the way up into the Glory, the God-shine, which outshines the sun. It’s not just a story about transcending the valley and the crowds. It’s about transcending ourselves, in Christ. It’s a lifetime climb to the Light. Being **dazzled**. Being **discipled**. Being **delivered**, in Christ. First, it’s being dazzled: *‘Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.* Here some disciples, that I call the Three Amigos, glimpse what they’ve never seen before. I call it the God-Shine, the dazzling light which is coming to light up all humanity, right before our eyes. This is the last and largest Epiphany of the season. Here is an eyewitness account of what theologians call a “theophany,” which, in Greek, means “an appearance of God?” In verse 2, Matthew describes what that looked like, from the Three Amigos eyewitness account, *“And Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.”* Luke adds another detail that Matthew skipped, that this happened while Jesus was praying up there. I think he was praying up a storm, that we, His followers might see God in a new light. Have you ever been dazzled? By a great light? By a great person? By a brand new idea? By a great poem or prayer? (Note that dazzling sermons are not in that list!) Have you ever been dazzled by someone’s great love for you? Did that love, whether God’s or another’s, help you to see them and maybe yourself, in a new light? Then that’s a transfiguration you have seen for yourself. Maybe you think that what happened was unprecedented, that God had never done this Big Light thing before. You’d be wrong. Matthew’s Gospel remembers Moses on Mt. Sinai and Elijah on Mt. Carmel when Israel was called to see itself transfigured from being God spectators into being a special light to the nations, in dark and troubled times, such as our own. To the Jews, the reappearance of Moses and Elijah was a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God. We don’t know if they climbed up or took the escalator down, but Matthew’s verse three says: *‘Suddenly, there appeared*

to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.” Now Jesus’ Kingdom Glory has some company and some talking points! Moses and Elijah get transfigured from the past to the present time, to speak together, of a future kingdom, yet to come. Remember, Old Moses stood wide eyed on Mt. Sinai, and after he came down the mountain, “Moses did not know that the skin of his dazzled face shone (transfigured) because he had been talking with God.” Mary Magdalen ran back from Jesus’ empty tomb, dazzled with that same God-shine. What would that shine look like in our lives? Peter says to us, in 2 Peter, “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.” The question is “Can we trust or train our hearts to see Jesus better than our eyes do?” Can we be more attentive to Jesus’ life, seen in others, and they seeing Him in us? Can we learn to see God working in the world? Do we want to see that for ourselves?

Sadly, instead of greater attentiveness to Christ, Peter makes a foolish, attention-deficit proposal to shade and upgrade the vision with some extra visual proof. His big idea was building three “selfie” booths, on Mt. Tabor. He proposes the shrine, instead of the shine, *“Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three booths or tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”* We too, prefer the dazzling spiritual glory of the mountain top to the eternal glory of the Cross. Now the journey moves to being discipled. Jesus sends the disciples backsides back down the backside of their peak experiences. He sends them and us, not into greater heavenly spectacle, or earthly status, but into greater discipleship. Just as St. Mark’s is sent out from community into community, into mission, in His Name. It is good, not just to be here, as Peter says, watching the show, but to be out there, not with eyes on the skies, but eyes on the prize. Out there in mission, to see what God is doing to transfigure, not just Himself, but the world. Not only with Moses and Elijah, but with us.

So here comes the next big surprise: Peter hears God’s Word tweeting from the cloud, saying *“Here is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* But, even hearing that, all the visual tidal wave of Kingdom Light, on Mt. Tabor, this barrage of God-Shine may seem too much for us, at first *So “When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.”* It was all too much, a lot like life overcome by info overload, today. One thing was needed, which they did not see. Jesus sees what they need. Not more spectacle, or big

ideas, but His daily human and holy touch, of His which can transfigure each one of us, fallen souls. With a voice, not from the clouds, but from His own heart, Jesus says, simply, *“Get up and do not be afraid.”* Jesus sees beyond our foolishness, denial, and fear. He sees beyond our bodies, and our spirits hitting the deck, on the battlefields of life. He sees that we cannot rise up or shield ourselves from our foolishness and fear, without Him. We need more than a heavenly vision. We need God speaking with us down on Earth, where Heavenly visions are few and far between. We may not have seen the vision of Jesus, lifted high on the mountain. But we can see the vision become real in seeing Jesus down on the streets and Jesus lifted up on the Cross, to raise us up. People like us seeing the human hand of God lifting the dead limbs of the paralyzed ones, the human hand of God opening the dead eyes of the blind, the same human hand of God’s Son, bleeding, reaching forth His dying arms of love, from the hard wood of the Cross. The Cross that we build for Him, in our foolishness, denial and fear. And so we come to the final verses, the most significant for us all: Here it is: *“And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.”* Not just where, but HOW do we see that Light, waiting, as if for us alone? Not in our fears or our foolishness or in our plans, but in Jesus alone.

Matthew ends the Epiphany Light Show, with a final, secret yet to be revealed. The secret of our deliverance: *“As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”* This is a spoiler alert that could not be told by us or revealed by God until all was accomplished in Jerusalem and in the New Jerusalem to come. And until all is accomplished in us. That God intends to rise in us, not just in Jerusalem. Pray that the God of Transfiguration has some more God-Shine and some more down-to-earth, kingdom mission, in store for you. This Lent, come to the Easter Light, first in your fearful Heart, and then, and see for yourself what it is all for: transfigured lives, and finally a transfigured world, for us all. And to God be the Glory, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.+

