

Has it ever happened to you that things are going really rough, but then God drops something into your life and you say, “That’s just what I needed!” Well, today we are going to see that the Transfiguration is just what we need. I’d like to talk about three situations in which the Transfiguration is just what we need. The Transfiguration is just what we need 1. when our bodies are frail, 2. When our loved ones go to heaven, and 3. When things don’t go exactly as we planned.

First, the Transfiguration is just what we need when our bodies are frail. Our Gospel begins, **“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.” (Mark 9:2)** “He was transfigured” means that his appearance changed. You see Jesus is God and man in one person, but for most of his life on earth, Jesus hid his divine glory so that he looked just like any other man, but for these brief few minutes or however long it lasted, Jesus let his divine glory shine through his humanity. Matthew tells us that **“His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light” (17:2)** Luke tells us that the **“appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning” (Luke 9:29)** Mark tells us that **His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. (Mark 9:3)** With the snow fall the last few days, I was out in my driveway yesterday shoveling snow and it struck me how pure white the snow was. And I thought about the fact that Jesus’ clothes were even whiter than this pure white snow. **“His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.” (Mark 9:3)** No human being could make Jesus’ clothes so white. It was a brightness that could only come from heaven.

The glorious appearance of Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration is a preview of what Jesus will look like when he returns again in glory. And the Bible says that when Jesus returns he is going to transform us so that our lowly bodies will be like his glorious body. The Bible says in Philippians 3:21, **“Our citizenship is on heaven and we eagerly await a Savior from there who will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:21)** Of course, Jesus’ glory is his own. Jesus is God and we are not. But Jesus is going to transform us so that our bodies are glorious just like his body is glorious. In 1 Corinthians 15 it says, **“And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. ... Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:49, 51-52)** Jesus is also going to share his glory with us. Jesus is going to transform us into the likeness of his glory.

That’s why the transfiguration is *just what we need* to think about when our bodies are frail. This really hit me this last week. I was at a nursing home on Thursday giving a devotion. And my devotion was based on the Transfiguration. And it was a moving experience for me to talk to them about this passage because I could say to them because I could say to them, “Sometimes we our bodies feel weak. Sometimes we have aches and pains. But Jesus is going to transform us. He is going to transform our lowly bodies so that they are like his glorious body. You also are going to be transfigured. Of course, Jesus is the Son of God and we are not, but the Bible does say in Philippians 3:21 that Jesus is going to “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” In 1 John chapter 3:1 says, **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”**

I heard a pastor this week talking about the transfiguration of Jesus and he said that it reminds him of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. Jesus looked like a caterpillar and then all of sudden he was a butterfly. We are caterpillars. Someday Jesus is going to transform us into butterflies. When Jesus comes back we are going to burst forth in glory. So the Transfiguration is just what we need when our bodies are frail.

Second, the Transfiguration is just what we need when our loved ones go to heaven. Our Gospel says, **And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.** Moses had died about 1400 years before. And Elijah had gone to heaven almost 900 years before. And yet here they both are still alive. This tells us that when believers die their souls go to heaven. Jesus said whoever believes in me will live even though they die and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Here's Moses and Elijah still alive many many years after they went to heaven. This is comforting for us when we think about our believing loved ones who have gone before us. They are alive with Jesus in heaven. And notice also that Peter, James and John recognize Moses and Elijah without being introduced to them. That's an indication that we are going to recognize and know our believing loved ones in heaven. If Peter, James and John can recognize Moses and Elijah whom they've never met, then certainly in heaven you are going to recognize your believing loved ones whom you've known for many years. So the Transfiguration is just what we need when our loved ones go to heaven.

Finally the Transfiguration is just what we need when things don't go exactly the way we planned. Six days earlier, Jesus had asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Peter was absolutely right. But even though Peter was right, things didn't work out the way Peter thought they would. When Peter said, you are the Christ the Son of the living God, Peter didn't have in mind that Jesus would die. In fact, in a couple of weeks, we will hear in the Gospel that when Jesus broke the news to his disciples that he was going to die, Peter actually rebuked Jesus, "Never Lord, this shall never happen to you." Jesus dying was not in Peter's plan. But if Jesus' hadn't of died on the cross, then he would not have saved us from our sins. And if he wouldn't have saved us from our sins, then we wouldn't be able to share in his glory. In order for us to get the glory that's whiter than the snow, Jesus needed to trade places with us¹ and take on the shame that we deserve. Jesus' plan we better than Peter's plan. But Peter didn't understand that yet. Even here on the Mountain of Transfiguration, did you notice that Peter wants to stay on the mountain: **"Lord it is good for us be here. Let us put up three tents, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah."** Peter, very understandably, wants to prolong this glorious mountain top experience. I'm sure that you have had mountain top moments in life. And don't you want to prolong those mountain-top moments? Don't you think, "Wouldn't it be great if it would always be like this? Why can't it always be like this?" But Jesus' plans are always better than our plans. If our life were nothing but success, we might not have the desire to go to the real mountain top of heaven. God's plan for us is to get to the mountain top of heaven, and the mountain top of heaven is way better than any plans we might have for ourselves down here on earth.

Things didn't go exactly the way Peter wanted them to. Does it ever happen to you that things don't go exactly the way you wanted them to? Maybe you experience some unexpected set-back. When things don't go exactly the way we want them to, remember that that Jesus' plan is to get you to that Transfiguration glory, and any set-backs that we might experience are actually part of Jesus' plan to get us to that Transfiguration glory. So when you go through set-backs the Transfiguration is just what you need. Because the Transfiguration reminds me that Jesus' goal is to get me to there, and whatever setback I experienced is somehow part of Jesus' plan to get me to there, maybe the setback was to humble me so that I don't become too proud, maybe it was so that rely more completely on him. But Jesus always has a bigger plan in mind, and the bigger plan is to get you to that Transfiguration glory.

So we can see how in lots of situations in life the Transfiguration is just what we need. And it's just what we need as we go now into Lent. Remember a few weeks ago I told you that we are in the season of Epiphany and in the season of Epiphany God reveals to us who Jesus is. Well, this is the Last Sunday of Epiphany and if Epiphany is about God telling us who Jesus is then the Transfiguration is the perfect ending for Epiphany because here on the Mountain of Transfiguration God himself speaks from the cloud and tells us who Jesus is: "This is my Son whom I love." But the Transfiguration is also the perfect set up for Lent because Peter, James and John were about to see Jesus suffer and die, and seeing Jesus in glory was just what they needed to help

¹ I owe this insight to WELS pastor James Hein.

them through very difficult time. So in all kinds of circumstances remember Jesus' glory on the Mountain of Transfiguration. Because remembering Jesus' glory on the mountain of Transfiguration is just what we need. Amen.