

St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church

Keller, Texas

Sermon for February 14, 2021 ~ Epiphany Last B

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W. P. Dubose in his *Soteriology of the New Testament* said that no definition is complete without including its purpose (or its final cause). It is not enough to say what a thing is. One must go on to say what it is for, what it is to be, its intention and destiny. This holds true of everything from a monkey wrench to a person. One would not think of explaining to a child what a monkey wrench *is* without saying what it is *for*. But, unfortunately, we assume the identity of a person merely on the basis of what one *is* without including what one is *for*.

In Mark's account of the Transfiguration of Christ, we see the same misunderstanding among the disciples: they had identified Jesus on the basis of what he was – God's anointed messiah – but they still did not understand what his purpose was. This great moment in their experience with Christ marked a turning point in their understanding of who he was, who they were, and what the purpose of their lives was to be.

Mark tells us that Jesus' garments became dazzling white – whiter than white. No other garments had ever been so white as his in that moment. His whole face was illuminated in a new light. It was like an experience you may have had with a friend you had known for years, but suddenly one day you see that friend in a different way, as though you had never seen him before. This is what happened to the disciples there on the Mount of Transfiguration. Later, after the Passion and Resurrection, the disciples understood the meaning of that glorious moment. There are several things it did for them and it can do the same for us.

To begin with, the Transfiguration shows that great visions of the future can transform the way we look at the present. Life should be looked at as both now and not yet.

You may remember the story of Michelangelo struggling down the street with a chunk of marble. Someone asked him why he wanted it and he said, "There is an angel inside trying to get out." He had a vision of a beautiful statue of an angel, but he would have to start with a rough chunk of marble. Knowing the way ahead changed the way that man looked at that rock.

Without a great vision of the future, we have a limited understanding of the present. The disciples had only begun to know the meaning of Jesus' ministry. As we read the gospels, we see how they struggled along with him and how he unfolded the vision for them so that finally they understood the present in a new way.

Jesus' purpose as the Savior of the universe is the greatest vision humanity has ever known. When it becomes the great vision of your life to follow in his way, you too will know the transforming power of the Transfiguration and you will see your life, and the lives of others, in an entirely new way.

The Transfiguration also shows that truly great visions should be trusted. The disciples who were with Jesus on the mountaintop had a great vision that would later reinforce their lives and faith and help them evaluate what later happened to them. Jesus, likewise, would later draw strength and courage from this experience. He knew then as he had known in his baptism that the voice of the Father had spoken to him and given him a great vision. He knew then that he would have to endure ridicule and

pain and even death if he trusted that vision. But, because the vision was so great, he also knew it was what God wanted him to do and God would not let him down. He would recall this high moment many times as he did what he came to do, as he lived out his purpose.

Several years ago, I was driving Gay to the hospital where she would undergo major surgery. Along the way, she had a vision of an angel and it brought her comfort. She went into surgery with a sense of confidence because of the reassurance that came to her from that vision. Now, you may explain her vision any way you please, but the result of the experience for her was a new trust in something beyond herself.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan gives us that scene where all the people begin to doubt that there is a Celestial City because they are down in the valley of the fog. Pilgrim says to them, "Why, you know there is a Celestial City. Did we not see it from the top of Mount Clear?" He reminded them of the great vision they had in that hour when they saw the City of God. They needed to remember that vision and trust it now that they were in the fog.

We all need that kind of trust in that which is greater than ourselves. Jesus and the disciples trusted in the vision they had on the Mount of Transfiguration and it made a great difference in the way they faced the struggle of their lives.

The Transfiguration also shows us that great visions are always intended to draw us forward toward the fulfillment of great purposes.

When they were on the mountain, Peter cried out, "Let's stay here. Let's build shelters in this place. Let's stop the procession right now." In Luke's telling of the story, it says that Peter didn't know what he was saying. That's a kind way of putting it. He was, in fact, saying the most human thing he could have said. Psychologists say that we all have a place in life where we want to settle down and stop the procession. We want to try to stop life and sit blissfully gazing at the visions we have. The Transfiguration is sure testimony that it won't work. God gives us great visions to move us on toward the realization of the purposes, goals, and realities of the vision.

It is like the story of the commencement exercises of one of our universities. The president did not realize that his voice was being carried over the public address system as he presented the diplomas to the graduates. Because the class was so large and he was mindful of the time, he would hand the diploma to each student and say, "Congratulations. Keep moving."

That's what we need to hear in life when we've had a great vision. The vision is *not* to stop life in its tracks, but to congratulate us on having reached a certain point and send us on our way with encouragement and hope. Jesus and his disciples had a great experience on the mountaintop, but when they came down, they found themselves in the valley of human need almost immediately. There was a father crying out to Jesus because his son had a terrible illness and needed the healing grace of Christ.

So, today, God has a great vision for you. But don't use it to stop the procession! Ask God to let that vision become such a part of you and a part of our outlook on life that you will be able to go into the valley of human suffering and minister to the needs of others. As God give you that vision today, he says to you, "Congratulations! Keep moving."