

Year B Transfiguration Sunday Last After the Epiphany 2024 Mark 9 vv2 to 9

Have you ever heard of “the butterfly effect”? It’s the theory that a small event in one part of the world – such as the flapping of butterfly wings – can have a huge impact somewhere else in the world. This idea, that small events can cause big change is particularly important in tv shows or movies – and there are plenty of them – dealing with time travel. If you travel in time and do or say something that shouldn’t have been done or said, you could completely change your present or future. People have, for many centuries, been fascinated with the idea that, maybe, we could travel back in time. The movie, “Back to the Future”, is the story of a teenaged boy named Marty who does just that. He travels back in time, to a time when he wasn’t even born, and he meets his parents. His parents are supposed to fall in love, get married, and give birth to Marty. But Marty’s appearance seems to be messing that up and if they don’t fall in love, Marty will no longer exist. Of course, Marty works very hard to make sure his parents do fall in love so that he doesn’t change the future that, for him, has already happened.

The movie is meant to be pure entertainment but the underlying topic is serious. Knowing the future suddenly puts a lot of responsibility on your shoulders in the present. You live differently because you know what is going to happen...and today, *we* see the future.

The transfiguration of Jesus is a glimpse, for us – just as it was for Peter, James, and John – it is a glimpse of God’s future, the ultimate future. Unlike in the movies, God’s ultimate future cannot be changed. It will happen with us, because of us, and – oftentimes – in spite of us. God’s future is a guarantee.

What is God's future? Let's take a look at the symbolism found within this story of the transfiguration. It happens on a mountain, the symbolic place of revelation, the traditional place where heaven and earth meet. Moses and Elijah both met with God on mountains and here they are again, on a mountain in the presence of God and God's Son...a connecting point where God's kingdom in its fullness is revealed to those living in the current brokenness. Jesus' clothing become a dazzling white and Mark makes sure we know this is no earthly bleach job, this is perfect heavenly white, blinding in its brilliance. A cloud suddenly appears above them and, from out of the cloud, God's voice is heard, just like at Jesus' baptism, telling them, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" In God's future, Jesus is revealed in his astounding glory, Lord of all creation. In God's future, those who were long dead are seen talking with those very much alive in the present, and God is with the people, speaking directly to the people.

The disciples are, quite understandably, terrified in the moment. Peter, though, grasps the amazing implication of what he is seeing and hearing. "Master," he blurts out, "It is good that we are here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, and one for Moses, and for Elijah." These dwellings he mentions are tents made of cloth – able to be quickly put up and taken down. The proper word for these tents is "tabernacle". The Jewish Feast of Tabernacles is one of seven feasts of Israel found in Scripture. It was not only a remembrance of the days when God dwelled with the people of Israel in tents in the wilderness, but it is also a looking forward to the day when God and the people, people of all nations, will again "tabernacle" together. Peter, looking at a dazzling Jesus, two prominent yet long dead Jewish figures, and hearing the voice of God, thought that the time long-

awaited had arrived. It must've seemed to him that God's future was here in all its fullness.

It wasn't though. Peter was wrong. The future had been glimpsed but it is not yet fully here. There was still a journey ahead of Jesus – a journey of healing, of casting out demons, reconciling people, facing rejection, and of carrying a cross. The future has been seen, though. And that means living differently in the present. The future, God's future, now shapes the present with urgent responsibility.

Tom Long tells the story of meeting privately with a man he greatly admired. This man was well-known for his books and lectures on human relationships. "He was an elderly man," Long writes, "and the kind of open spirit who welcomed questions on any subject, so I felt brave enough to ask him what was the main change that aging had brought to his life. He thought for a bit, then replied, 'I view everything from the point of view of my death.'" (Long, *Shepherds and Bathrobes*, p.100). At first, this answer seems strange, maybe even a little morbid. But this old man actually had the wisdom and the maturity to acknowledge what most younger people often avoid and deny: we are mortal. He understood the truth that he would die, "and his remaining days were shaped by that coming event into a time both precious and urgent...his knowledge of the future had placed upon him the responsibility of making the remaining time matter" (adapted from Long, p.100).

With wisdom and maturity, we see everything in our lives from the point of view of God's future. We have seen that future today and it must shape our daily thoughts and actions into a time both precious and urgent. We have knowledge of

God's future and that places on us the responsibility of making the remaining time matter.

Christians have been described as ambassadors of a disputed sovereignty who have arrived at court too soon. We have seen the future – the good news of God's arriving kingdom, the kingship of Jesus, yet we are called to serve him now in a time when his Lordship is hidden and is doubted by many. "We know that the future belongs to the Prince of Peace, and so we work for peace in [an age of war]. We know that one day justice will roll down like waters, and we work today for that justice, even though [it is difficult and often feels like a losing battle.] We have seen the risen Christ, and we know that in him the image of God in humanity has been restored [and so we work today for the poor, the marginalized,] and all others denied dignity in our age.

We give to the food bank because in God's future, all are invited to eat their fill at God's banquet table. We tend to the sick and we comfort those who mourn because in God's future there will be no more mourning, no crying, no pain. We walk to end homelessness, we host breakfasts for others outside our church family, we raise money to continue the work of God because we work *with* God toward the fulfillment of the future shown to us today.

We often think of the fulfillment of God's future *only* in terms of the work of social justice but there is much more to God's future. In God's kingdom, the pillar of social justice is joined in importance by the other three pillars of worship, prayer, and Scripture study. Together these form the foundation of a house built on rock rather than on sand, they are the marinade in which we transform into people living lives according to the ways of God's kingdom. These are the pillars that,

together, form us into a people who know and love God, a people who become God's love. Robert Schnase, in his book called *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, writes, "To live in community with others is part of God's plan and intention for us. A congregation is a school for love, the place where God's Spirit forms us and the place where we learn how to give love to and receive love from friends, neighbours, and strangers. The church is the presence of Christ in the world, the means by which God knits us into community in order to transform our lives and the lives of those around us" (p.16).

Jesus was transformed in an instant before us in the story today. We, too, are being transformed. The future we glimpsed today – God's future – is our future. It is the good news Jesus proclaimed: The kingdom is here; I bring the kingdom. Those words belong on our lips now. Our words, our transformation, our future – through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, let's live God's future.