

This Sunday is about change—change in the way things were; change in the way things are; change in the way things will be. Right away, you probably have mixed feelings about this message. So let’s switch gears, just a little. We all know what the word “figure” means, as in, “watching my figure.” After age twenty-five, it seems, keeping our own figures in line is a constant struggle. This is the Sunday of Transfiguration. Transfiguration means “changing the outward appearance.” What the thing really is does not change—only how it looks.

Tadpoles are transfigured into frogs. Babies become adults. Our DNA does not change. We just look older. In the Greek churches of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Transfiguration Sunday is called Metamorphosis Sunday. The transfiguration of Jesus, His metamorphosis, is not just him going from youth to adulthood. It’s not really a development at all. Instead, in the transfiguration, we see Jesus the way He always was and always will be. For a few moments, the cover of humility is pulled back. We see things the way they really are. His face took on the appearance of the sun at high noon. His cloak, normally stained with traveling dirt, had the brilliance of pure light.

This was a drastic change for the disciples, but not for Jesus. Hidden beneath the appearance of an ordinary, wandering teacher was God in His eternal splendor. The disciples, almost always confused about who Jesus was and what His mission was about, saw His glory with their own eyes. And this would’ve been a lot to process. If the disciples had been able to string a few coherent thoughts together in this moment—which is debatable, to be sure—they might have remembered Jesus’s predictions of rejection—that He would be rejected by His own people and thrown out of their synagogues. But here, in place of human rejection, was divine acceptance. They heard the voice from the cloud. This is my Son, my Chosen One. Heaven had touched down on earth, and Peter reacted in a way that, to be candid, makes a lot of sense. He wanted to bottle it up. He wanted to make it last. Let’s make tents, he said—three little tabernacles to house the glory—to keep it going. The kingdom of God has come! Let’s keep it here.

But that’s not what happened. Within moments, Jesus looked normal. The next day, they were off the mountain, surrounded by crowds, confronted by people with evil spirits. Where was the glory? What happened to it? It was back to being hidden. Evidently, full glory was not going to be used yet. James or John or Peter could have wondered, “Well, what’s Jesus going to do that was better than the mountaintop?”

Even after Jesus told them, they could not fathom the ultimate way He would display His glory, not until after it happened. It did not begin with a display of power. It was just the opposite.

The glory was there, but hidden, as Jesus suffered in the garden; as He was arrested; falsely accused; as He carried His cross to the hilltop, and the nails entered His wrists and feet. As the cross was lifted into place with a sickening thud, and Jesus cried, “My God, My God, why

have you forsaken me?” there was nothing like the transfiguration happening at all. No streaming light. No voice from heaven. Moses and Elijah do not swoop down at the last minute to prevent this tragedy. It’s just a bloody, battered, crucified Jesus, tormented by the fact that His Father’s not answering.

But don’t be fooled by the way it looks. What the Father said at the Transfiguration was true. Jesus was His Son, His Chosen One. The One Chosen to pay for sin’s astronomical cost. The One Chosen to be the sacrifice; to be the currency; His life laid down on the cross would balance the books. His life counts for yours. Jesus was punished as if He did all the things you’ve done that you’re ashamed of. Jesus assumed the debt built up through neglect, selfishness, rebellion. He swallowed it all, and died. Which means all the sin—all the shame—is totally gone, dead and in the grave.

And what about Jesus? The floodlights of God’s glory shine forth at His resurrection. What was glimpsed at His transfiguration shines out in a steady stream from an empty tomb. He was dead but now lives; He is changed, yet his voice is recognizable; the scars from his death unmistakable. By his rising to life, he has opened the way to the place where Moses and Elijah stand; the place where the Father and Spirit dwell. He has opened the way to heaven. If you want this, it is yours in Jesus.

The Transfiguration was a preview of sorts. It was also communicating an ongoing reality. Here’s what I mean by that. The voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, My Chosen One; listen to him.” Listen to Him. The disciples who were there that day did their best to listen to Jesus, and in the end, were transformed by the words of eternal life. They became bold, courageous, enlightened.

I can promise you this today in the Lord: if you will listen to Him; if you will listen to Jesus as He speaks from the four gospels; if you will take His words to heart; you too will be changed. You too will be transformed, in your thoughts and attitudes; trust will replace worry; love will replace hate; compassion will replace cruelty; faith will replace fear. Your thoughts about sin will be transfigured; you’ll lose your appetite for it, and when you fall, it will grieve you more deeply, because you know what it cost your Savior. I’m serious when I say I can promise transformative change in you, but you must create the time to listen to Him and His voice is heard in the Word. Get in it. Be in it. Take it with you from the mountaintop down to where most of life gets lived.

And know this: there is still another transfiguration coming. The final chapter on our transformation has not yet been written. When it is written, you will be a part of it; a final metamorphosis; a body like the body of Jesus; the resurrection of the dead; the life of the world to come; one last change in the power and love of Jesus. Listen to Him.