



Transformed By Love
2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei

As we anticipate the return to some form of normal now that the vaccine is being distributed and inoculated, we mourn the nearly half million people who have died from COVID-19 in the United States and millions more worldwide. We are painfully aware that the future is not yet here, and, at the same time, we also know that the future will not and cannot be the same as the past. Everywhere we turn we hear that 2020 was an awful year and yet, perhaps we need to resume a humbler attitude and consider, as we used to do in the past, that we are still talking about “the year of the Lord 2020.” In other words, although we cannot ascribe the pandemic to God, we know God was still present. But how? What was God up to? What hard lessons have we learned from our experience of last year the events? Have hearts changed? As we ponder on events that have revealed what we didn’t want to see in terms of race relations and the sin of racism, immigration and undocumented farm workers involved in food production and distribution, the inequalities within the justice and health care systems, has compassion increased?¹ When we say we want our normal way of life to return, what do we mean by “normal”? “Normal” for whom? From what perspective? Should the new “normal” demonstrate respect, equity, and consideration for people of all races, all places, all walks of life, and all abilities?

There must be an intentional call to re-shape and re-form our culture and governing policies. People are finally aware that the way we lived our life up until last year is not fair and pleasant for all. Some people may say: “If you don’t like it, you may leave.” Do we really want to embrace that restrictive view of our society? Can we picture a more humane future for all? Can we picture a new normal for Nativity Lutheran Church where diversity is welcomed and celebrated and true hospitality becomes the foundational value on which we re-build the beloved community, a piece of the kingdom of heaven in Spring Hill? Can we picture ourselves going to our black and brown neighbors, our gay friends, our single mothers, our working poor, and our immigrant farmers and say, “You are a beloved child of God. You are important to me.”?

We have just read the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. Leading up to this important event, Jesus has been very busy. He has fed a multitude of people, cured a blind man in Bethsaida, and received Peter’s faith confession at Cesarea Philippi. Following Peter’s acknowledgement that he is “the Messiah,” Jesus had a deep conversation about his upcoming suffering, death, and resurrection with his disciples and what it means to follow him.

¹ [Transforming Racism – Roxy Manning, PhD \(roxannemanning.com\)](https://www.roxymanning.com/)



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After all that, Jesus goes on a hike with three of his inner circle, Peter, James, and John. They might have thought they were on a prayer excursion with Jesus, since he has done that often. Instead, they witnessed something totally unexpected and striking to the point that the disciples were left in awe. Jesus transformed right in front of them and assumed a blinding brilliance. In addition to that, two great Jewish figures of their people's past, Moses the giver of the Law and Elijah the prophet, also appeared talking with Jesus. We can almost imagine the heavy pounding of the disciples' hearts, their mouths dropping open, and their eyes bugging out.

Peter could not contain himself for too long and probably wanted to be part of that conversation, and with the impulsivity he is famous for, he barged into the conversation and offered to build three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. What he said didn't make much sense. Mark gives a justification for that, saying that the disciples were terrified. Yet, before a mystery, silence is a better response. A silent contemplation of the mystery may yield more meaning. It was at that point that God intervened, declaring Jesus God's beloved Son and commanding the disciples to pay attention and listen to him.

The transfiguration of Jesus reveals him to be more than what the eyes can see. It lets us go beyond the external and the superficial, beyond the body form and the material, to what is inner, deeper, and not readily visible, a mystery that cannot be totally explained but can be approached only with awe and admiration.

A better translation for the word "trans-figuration" is "trans-formation." It is a better word because it suggests more clearly that Jesus went beyond the present "form" to show us what was there. The Greek word which Mark used, in fact, is meta-morphosis and is reminiscent of the ancient hymn that Paul used in his letter to the Philippian (2:6-11) to talk about Christ Jesus who even "though was in the form (morph) of God...emptied himself...being born in the likeness of humans."²

Jesus has given us a great gift by suspending his divine form to become vulnerable like us, and now again he gives us another gift by allowing us to penetrate the mystery by lifting the veil that obscures our sight. Through the transformation we get a glimpse of his true nature. It is like God telling us, "This is the Jesus you are following, do not fear but do as he says." That divine nature is in front of us and ahead of us; hang in there for that is where we are heading.

² Donahue and Harrington, Sacra Pagina, The Gospel of Mark, p. 269



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You might have heard of the Amish family that climbed in their horse buggy and headed for the city for some purchases. Once in a department store, father and son were mesmerized by two metal doors that opened and closed before them. At one point, an older woman followed her walker beyond the open doors into the empty room. Father and son watched with intense curiosity the numbers increasing and then decreasing on a side panel, and as the doors opened, a young and beautiful lady stepped out of the mysterious room. After collecting himself, the father commanded: "Jr., go fetch thy mother."

We know how an elevator works even as we are not knowledgeable about the gear that makes it work. We may not be able to explain what the transfiguration of our Lord is, but we can humbly receive in faith the divine testimony of the Father who spoke to Jesus at his baptism and here at his transfiguration right smack the middle of Mark's gospel. In both occasions, Jesus is declared the Beloved Son. God will not speak again, and at the end of the gospel, God is mysteriously silent. The faith and love of God's Beloved on the cross speaks of the mystery of God with us. Before the gift of God, we are invited to receive it in humility and in awe, making sure we listen and do what he says.

As we wait for the new normal, we can anticipate the freedom that the vaccine is going to give us; we can almost taste the day we can finally gather with the rest of fellow believers for worship and Christian fellowship, sing our hearts out, rebuild a diverse community, enjoy meaningful service opportunities, move about freely, and hug our loved ones. May the knowledge of Jesus' divinity shared with us make us resilient and bold in the face of the challenges ahead. amen.