



Sermon, February 11, 2018
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

“New Reality”

Scripture: Mark 9:1-13

9 ¹ And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with **a** power.”

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one **b** on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, **c** one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; **d** listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. ¹¹ Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” ¹² He said to them, “Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? ¹³ But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.”

Change

The story is told concerning a man who was celebrating his 100th birthday. He was approached by a news reporter, "I suppose you've seen a lot of changes in your day?" "Yes," said the centenarian, "and I've been against every one of them." (*Watching The World Go By*, W.E. Thorn, p.14)

Change has been part of the human experience since the beginning of time, but these days, it seems to occur at a much more rapid pace. Just think about the amount of change there has been in the area of computer technology alone. Had the automobile developed at a pace equivalent to that of the computer during the past twenty years, today a Rolls Royce would cost less than three dollars, get three million miles to the gallon, deliver enough power to drive the Queen Elizabeth II, and six of them would fit on the head of a pin! (By Rick Hicks, president of Operation Mobilization, from "The President's Corner," In Deed, Winter, 1997, submitted by Byron D. Neufeld, Kingsburg Mennonite Brethren Church, Kingsburg, California)

Meta- What?

Today’s story is about a very particular type of change. It is the most comprehensive and radical sort of change. It is the most Biblically-based sort of change. It is the most grounded-in-Jesus kind of change. It is called transformation. There is change, and there is transformation. A lot of us look at the word “change” and think of changing our clothes, or changing the color of paint on our walls, or, heaven forbid, changing the color of the carpet. Most people have this approach to the metanoia repentance that John the Baptist preached and Jesus started his ministry with. But this story of transfiguration is about another meta- word: *metamorphete*. This word in Greek is relates to another word we all studied about in Grade School when we went out and collected caterpillars and put them in jars. You remember that? We watched them spin cocoons or go into their chrysalis, and then suddenly one day the cocoon or chrysalis started to move, and what emerged? And what did our teachers call that process? Metamorphosis. The same word is used here.

The metanoia Jesus affects and inspires is not merely changing our minds, but transforming our consciousness and our lives, and consequently the world in which we are embedded as well. Jesus is way beyond change- his path is a path of transformation. This story is a dramatization of that fact.

Transfiguration = Transformation

The scene is very vivid, and is just the sort of thing George Lucas’ Industrial Light and Magic makes happen in Hollywood movies. In fact, it is a favorite way to represent an incredible transformation. Think of *Beauty and the Beast*, or more recently, *Shrek*. Think of the movie *Cocoon*, where the true bodies of the alien creatures visiting earth shine like lights. This image of the transfiguration of Jesus has provided the archetype of all such transformations. And so, 2000 years before Hollywood, we have this incredible scene of transformation and change.

Peter's response

Notice how Peter begins to jump in with his response, understandable as it is, considering how many shrines and cathedrals and tabernacles and temples humans erect at holy places. That seems to be our response to problems: let's create a new institution, a new structure. But notice what the voice says: “Listen to him.” So here we have Peter on the one hand, in the midst of an incredible theophany, and on the other hand he is trying to tame it, to fit it into his pre-existing categories of what and who God is and what God wants. And the voice, presumably of God, is saying, “Knock it off Peter, just listen to my Son.” (Wouldn't be a bad place to end the Gospels right there. Think how different things would be if we just managed to do that.)

“Just listen.” Peter's preconceptions had to change. Peter's ways of thinking about the Divine had to change. Peter has to change the usual way of doing things, the usual way of responding. His knee jerk reactions need to be restrained.

Jesus's transfiguration/change/transformation: This is not who you think it is - change your understanding. Symbolism in the transfiguration: When God changes, or when our conceptions about God change. When what we have received about the Divine changes. When our experience of the Divine breaks all the old categories. When our view of the world changes.

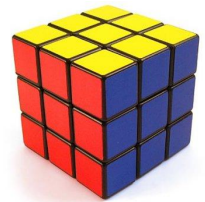
Disciples have to change (How else does one respond when what they think is unchangeable changes?) But this story is also very much about us today. People in the culture around us look at Jesus and see his message that we can be radically transformed as persons, and then they look at the church that delivers that message, and they see an institution that can't handle change on any level: carpets, paint colors, change of music styles, change of sermon styles, churches can't even handle a change in pastors. Are we even remotely ready to accept and try on the full-life, heart, soul, mind, strength transformation that God offers through Jesus Christ? How are we prepared for the radical transformation that death will bring?

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All these attitudes that we have that put up resistance to change and transformation – liking or not liking this pastor, this or that kind of music, noise or no noise, this or that carpet – who are they shining a spotlight on? Us, of course. They are not about God at all. We have this “My way or the highway” attitude that is all about us, not about God. It’s that coin-toss way of thinking about God: Yes or no, this way or that way only.

One of the biggest things that need to be transformed in the world is what we understand about God. We have what I call a coin-toss view of God and God’s Will or God’s Plan for the world. You know what that’s like: You pull out a coin and ask God to show you what to do. Heads for this, or tails for that. Or maybe we expand that idea a bit and look at God’s Will as if it was rolling a die or pair of dice: maybe this, maybe that, maybe something else.

I think that the best description of God’s Will or “God’s Plan for Your Life” is to view it as a Rubik’s Cube. You remember a Rubik’s cube, don’t you? It was invented in 1974 by a Hungarian professor, Rubik Erno, who taught at the Budapest College of Applied Arts. It is a cube in which each face of the cube is a different color, and each face is made up of smaller cubes. It is constructed so that you can twist the cube into a large number of different combinations of smaller cubes on the faces of the large cube. People have calculated that the **original 3x3x3 Rubik’s cube** has **43,252,003,274,489,856,000 possible combinations**, or 43 quintillion. And if you get larger Rubik’s cubes with more cubes on each face, the number increases astronomically!



I believe that God is the Holder of All Possibilities and Potentialities.



When we try to discern God’s Will, God comes to us holding a Rubik’s Cube of possibilities. We take the cube and twist it, and God looks at that and says, “Very interesting. Let’s see what happens with this.” God then comes along with each one of us to explore the results of our decisions, and how we creatively engage the world. We keep turning the face of the Rubik’s Cube, God keeps saying, “Very interesting. Let’s

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see what happens with this,” and so the universe, the earth, human civilizations, and our individual lives all arise out of the constant play of these Rubik’s Cube-like choices and possibilities.

The transfiguration of Jesus, illustrates the power and potential of human transformation. It is a prototype of what is possible in human life. The full realm of expanded reality of which Jesus is a part, or of which the church came to say he is at the center of, is opened up and revealed. The fullness of heaven that is revealed at his baptism, the voice affirming the presence of that reality as being fully realized and contained in Jesus, is again revealed in this transfiguration. The voice comes and gives instructions: Listen to him. He is your guide into this transformed life. He is your guide into revealing that aspect of divinity that is open to you and resides within you, that residing place prepared for the Spirit. Jesus says “Achieve your full potential, your possibilities are infinite.”

Invitation and Challenge