



“Changing Form and Nature in Us!”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

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Scripture (NRSV):

Luke 9:28-43

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹ Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴² While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Sermon:

Anyone who works with words will tell you that they choose words carefully. Whether you are writing as a passion, writing as a profession, writing as a student...we choose our words carefully. To make sense, to make meaning. To be understood, and yes, to change others.

The gospels set out to change others. We know that.

Yet, the writers of the gospels do not make it easy. This gospel comes to us across millennia of time, vast chasms of cultural difference, in translation after translation from ancient languages that are exceedingly foreign to us.

I found the use of the word “transfigured” in my bible, provoking. What was that supposed to mean???

So, I read a definition of the word: “to be *transformed* into something more beautiful or elevated.”

I looked up transformation and got, “a thorough or dramatic change”.

And synonyms for both of these words included “*metamorphosis*”.

Metamorphosis is described as “a profound change in form, from one stage to the next in the life history of an organism.”

Jesus is definitely undergoing a thorough and dramatic change, up there on the mountain with the giver of the Law, Moses, the greatest of the prophets, Elijah. He stands there as their equal. He speaks with them as their equal.

His face is changed, his clothes dazzle, he speaks with the giants of the Jewish faith. But what he speaks about with them is his upcoming gigantic *metamorphosis*, his most “profound change in form” that will happen in Jerusalem ...a metamorphosis through suffering, and death, into resurrection.

And lest you think this is some kind of theological mistake, this costly metamorphosis that Jesus discussed with Moses and Elijah, is next reinforced by the same heavenly voice that spoke at the baptism of Jesus...the voice that declares, “this is my son, my Chosen.” “Listen to him.”

Which, of course, the disciples seem unable to do. They are half-asleep.
But the voice says: Pay attention. Don't go through life asleep inside, keep your heart and mind awake!

Learn from the Teacher. Grow. Be changed.

Which we struggle to do. But Peter tried, and we try...

Jesus and his three companions climb down from the place of *transmutation*, *transformation*, *transfiguration*, *metamorphosis*...and find misery, and sickness and suffering.

Which the disciples feel powerless to vanquish.

Yet, Jesus, rebuking the powers of death and sickness, does; Jesus vanquishes them from the suffering child and fills the heart of the father with joy rather than despair.

What are we called to learn from Jesus? From this scripture?

Evolution is in us. Learning, growing, changing is core to creation.

Jesus goes before us, showing us that it is possible.

Our transformation, our ongoing metamorphosis is our task.

And that transformation is also the transmutation, the transfiguration, the very metamorphosis of the world.

Changing the form and nature of the world from brokenness to wholeness, from sickness to healing, from anguish to joy, from powerlessness to the power to restore.

Jesus goes before us as healer and restorer of the world.

And the voice from heaven says "pay attention".

And Jesus says, you will be given power to do these things at the end of the gospel.

The life history of the organism that is humanity, the story of the good creation of God, found in the first chapter of the book of Genesis...

This life history must undergo “*a profound change in form and nature*”.

Jesus shines with that change on the mountaintop, but he doesn't stay there. He goes down, into the suffering and the brokenness, and to Jerusalem, where he will face a deep and profound metamorphosis...through suffering, through death on a Roman cross, into the new life stage that is the life of resurrection.

And along the way, at every moment, he tries to encourage that transformation in the world, in the disciples, in the hurting.

Jesus transfigures, Jesus transmutes, Jesus transforms:

- In healing and the return to wellness and joy...as when the creation began.
- In beauty and in power...as when the creation began.
- In welcome and in communion with God...as when the creation began.

And what does that have to do with you or me, as we gather here on the corner of 4th and Washington?

Everything!

For we are called by the heavenly voice to Listen to the Chosen one of God, the Son, and learn from him.

Imagine the transformative power of following his model, walking in his Way! Imagine bearing the beauty and joy and power of being a healer when there is sickness. Imagine being the community that says there is life, and beauty and healing in this neighborhood, in this city, in the lives of the young people in our basement?

- Imagine the changing of form and nature in our neighborhood or our city, as we bring warmth and light and hope, to homeless youth?
- Imagine the change if we share the possibility of urban beauty rather than blight by the freeway?
- Imagine this house of God as a home for all who have been cast out, rejected, denied their full humanity elsewhere?

Perhaps you don't feel the need to be changed, pretty happy with yourself?

But creation is NOT happy, is not content, is not healed or whole! The world suffers and the world groans...

Jesus was transfigured, the gospel writer tells us...but it was not for him, for his glory.

It was for the world.

We say this over and over again.

Unlike the sleepy Peter, James and John, are we awake, listening and learning?

Listen to these ancient lines:

- Jesus is the way to the Creator. A sign pointing to God.
- The Creator loved us so much that Jesus came on God's behalf to show us God's love. God's intention. God's design of beauty and wholeness for the world.
- Jesus was given to us not to condemn us but to save us.
- Jesus came and showed us the Way.

These are all classic lines of the Christian.

Are we awake enough to realize that these words are calling us to the transformation, the metamorphosis, the transmutation, the very transfiguration of the world?

We begin where we are: as student, or teacher, or doctor, or retired. As young or old, as diverse as we are. We realize that we are tools for transformation, in the life we live.

Transfigured: as the dictionary tells us; "to be *transformed* into something more beautiful or elevated."

Let us stay awake, and like Jesus, let us be willing to be changed, transfiguring the world around us and in us, into a vision of wholeness and beauty and peace!

I'll try, if you will...