

## **Sermon for the Transfiguration of our Lord, Year B**

The Text: Mark 9:2-9

If you happen to be in a dark place and you have access to a light, more times than not you would use that light. Light, by its very nature, disperses the dark. Even the smallest flicker of flame can pierce the deepest gloom. A child who is afraid of the dark might have a small night light to help them sleep in peace.

We humans seem to like our lights. We have come a long way from the humble camp fire. Now our cities are lit up so brightly that they can be seen from space. Our lights appear to be getting bigger and brighter because we seem to think that the greater the light the more the darkness will scatter.

The power of torches is determined by how much ‘candlepower’ or ‘lumens’ they have. The standard police torch has an output of about 82 lumens. A good LED flashlight produces about twice that, 150 lumens. The Polarion PH50 Helios Searchlight, however, has an output of 5,200 lumens (and a price-tag in excess of \$2,000). But if you want some serious light there is the XM18 prototype which has a staggering 18,000 lumens of power.

But there are times when we choose to limit the light we use. If we are driving on a country road at night we will dim our lights from high beam when a car is coming the other way, out of courtesy for the other driver.

During World War Two the windows of homes and buildings were sealed using heavy blackout curtains to prevent any glimmer of light from escaping and aiding enemy aircraft during their bombing raids.

Virtually all street lights were switched off and those left on were dimmed and shielded to deflect their light downward. Vehicle head-lights were fitted with slotted covers to deflect their beam down to the ground. As a result of these restrictions, human collisions with stationary objects were common during the war years. I imagine it would have been very frustrating to have light and not be able to use it.

There is a lot of darkness in our world that requires something other than our artificial lights in order to make it scatter. Jesus claims to be that light. In John’s Gospel account we hear Jesus say: *‘While I am in the world, I am the light of the world’* (9:5).

When we hear the account of the Transfiguration Jesus’ claims seem to be justified. In the reading from Mark it tells us that Jesus’ *clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could whiten them* (9:3). In Matthew’s

account of the same event, it says that *His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light* (17:2). And in Luke it says that *His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning* (9:29).

If they had been able to measure the output of light coming from Jesus that day I imagine there would have been quite a bit of candlepower in play, brighter than any LED lamp humans could produce! The light we humans are able to manufacture is always going to struggle when compared to the output of God's glory displayed in His Son.

But what was the nature of this Transfiguration light? Was it like some huge halogen lamp they use in stadiums which takes time to warm up before it takes effect? Was Jesus only now starting to get fired up in His ministry? Or was it like a signal flare that burns briefly and brightly before it is extinguished once again? Was this the moment when Jesus was about to go out with a blaze of glory?

The Transfiguration didn't seem to be either of these things. Rather, it was a light of revelation, where something that had previously remained hidden was uncovered. There was no *change* in Jesus that took place that day on the mountain. From eternity Jesus has always been the Son of God – the brilliant light of God. Jesus had shown glimpses of His light in the way He had taught with authority, healed the sick, cast out demons, controlled the forces of nature and forgiven the sins of the people.

But on that mountain His awesome light, His true identity, was clearly revealed for a brief instant in time. The covers of Jesus' humanity were torn away to give Peter, James and John a glimpse of His glory. Perhaps this experience is what led John to write: *'We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth'* (John 1:14) and Peter to write: *'We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His majesty'* (2 Peter 1:16).

But then, this could be a source of frustration for us. By His own admission Jesus came to be the light of the world. In the Transfiguration He showed the impressive quantity of light He could produce. So where is all this wonderful light? Why has He seemingly chosen to limit the illumination which He proved He can provide?

Where is the light of Christ when gang warfare breaks out in ordinary suburban streets and the authorities seem powerless to stop it? Where is this light when a pandemic turns our world on its head? Where is that light as the clouds of economic depression descend upon us? Is this light noticeable as the eyes of a

loved one grow dim and close for the last time or as a mother in South Sudan has to sit by and watch her baby starve to death for lack of food?

In a world which so desperately needs the kind of light which Jesus can bring, it appears to be so drastically limited and diffused. And it can also seem diffused in our own lives. How brightly does the light of Christ shine in your life? How easy is it for you to see His glory at work as you go about your everyday routines? Chances are it is not that easy at all.

Maybe you can more readily associate with the cloud which enveloped the three disciples, rather than the display of glory they witnessed. And that's okay. You see, Jesus was still in that cloud. When the Transfiguration light was gone and the disciples looked around, they saw no one except Jesus. For it is in our darkness when we truly need Jesus to be present.

The whole purpose of the Transfiguration was to shed light on what was about to happen and on what Jesus was about to do. You see, the light and glory of Jesus was going to truly shine in the darkness of the Cross on Golgotha.

Peter, James and John would have struggled to see any light when just a little while later Jesus bowed His head and gave up His Spirit. All of that potential glory would not have seemed diffused to them at that time, but extinguished. The darkness of a tomb was quite a contrast to the light of the Transfiguration.

Jesus did not confront the darkness of death with a burst of His light. He withheld His light and succumbed to darkness in such a way that He was completely embraced by it. But in this way He disempowered the hold the darkness had on us and gave us a new dawn of hope when before there was none.

This changes our perception of Christ's light in our world. We should not be overly concerned when the light of Jesus seems veiled or diffused or even absent completely. For this does not mean that Jesus is absent. He is concealed perhaps, but He is certainly not absent. The world keeps making things bigger and brighter and it makes no difference whatsoever to the darkness we face. So maybe the subtle ways Jesus chooses to shine His light are more effective after all. And you and I are one of those subtle ways. Jesus chooses to diffuse His light through us. As the Apostle Paul says in Second Corinthians 4, verse 6: *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Our knowledge of Jesus and what He has done has brought light into our lives. To know that Jesus has paid the price for our sins and that He has taken away the sting of death is surely more significant than the glimpse of glory Peter, James and John received on the Mount of Transfiguration. After all, they were given

orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until *after* Jesus had risen from the dead.

We live in the light of the resurrection and the knowledge of it. Does that make a difference to our lives? Surely it does! It reveals to us the hope we have and it brings clarity to our sense of purpose. And the light that shines in our hearts has some outward manifestations that bring glimpses of God's glory to our world.

So you might not find yourself being called to stand up to a group of rioters who are tearing apart a city block. But you can shine the light of Christ in the way you support those in authority in your own life.

Likewise you can't make much impact on the woes of the global economy, but you could reveal the trust you have in Jesus in the way you treat your own money and in the way you cast all your anxieties on the God who cares for you.

You will also shine the light of Jesus as you sit with that loved one who is dying, reminding them of their eternal hope and rejoicing, even in your grief, that not even the darkness of death can separate them from the light of Christ.

And though you can't hope to shed light on the starving millions in this world there are plenty of options for you to bring help to one or two of them or maybe even more, according to the blessings you have received and how God directs you.

We do have the light of Jesus in our lives and we also have the ability to use it. Jesus has shown us through what He did after the Transfiguration that nothing can extinguish His light. He truly is the light of the world and the light of our lives. May the light of Jesus continue to shine in our hearts so that His love can be revealed through us and bring His light to our world! Amen.