

Vicar Lucas Cochran
Sermon for February 19, 2023 Transfiguration Sunday
Matthew 17:1-9

Transformers: I think anyone who has been to the movies, or raised children in the nineties might know what these are. Robots that depending on what generation you prefer can turn into cars, trains, planes and even animals. Now I'm not saying that I am comparing Jesus to Transformers, but after we just read our Gospel today there is one phrase from the Transformers theme song that always reminds me of the Transfiguration, it starts with "transformers robots in disguise," and ends with "more than meets the eye." Again not comparing Jesus to the Transformers, but I will compare the passage we read today metaphorically with one line from their theme song,

"More than meets the eye," that's what I think about when I read our Gospel. "More than meets the eye." Well what did our eyes read today, what did the disciples see with their eyes that day?

Christ takes three of them up a high mountain, he then begins to shine in a way reserved for heavenly beings, and then two of the most well-known figures in Jewish culture appear. A cloud from heaven accompanied by the voice of God brings the disciples to their knees, gives them a message, and Christ tells them not to share any of it.

On first glance this just seems like another one of those signs or miracles that confirms Jesus' identity. After all we have read about those who have seen and heard voices and beings from heaven before when it comes to Jesus, none of this stuff is new to the reader, and this is also a relatively short passage. We might just pass over this quicker than intended, in order to get to the good bits for us to dissect, like the parables, or sermons that Christ shared. Those are the easy ones to lead Bible studies with, or to write sermons about. But like Transformers when you might not know exactly what you are looking at, there is more to this passage than meets the eye.

Picture it! The mountain top, a common location for miracles to happen in Jewish culture, not a surprise that this location would be where this miraculous scene would happen. But it's the subtleties in this passage that we can miss if we aren't sure what to look for.

Continue picturing it! While on the mountain top Jesus is met with two iconic figures from the disciples' faith and culture. Moses the law, and Elijah the prophet, two people all present instantly recognize and offer to build shelters for. After all these are icons in the Jewish culture, and you are obviously going to be on your best behavior in front of your heroes. Making them comfortable is the least the disciples could do.

Then a cloud filled with light descends around the disciples and speaks with the voice of God, giving them a confirmation of Christ's identity and a command that echoes back to

Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses shared his last words. Among them being, “the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him”.

This scene is filled with so much information in such a short amount of verses that it can be difficult to not catch the subtleties that are present.

First, when Christ shines with his transfiguration, try not to imagine the vampires from recent films as what he looked like, rather imagine it more akin to staring at the sun. After all Christ is showing us here in this scene his true identity, something to this day we struggle to comprehend mentally let alone stare at directly with our eyes.

Some argue what is happening here is that Jesus is revealing his divinity openly to his disciples, others claim that Christ is showing us and the disciples that this is the true form of humanity, the archetype that God originally wanted from the prototype Adam. While a third camp argues that both of these things are happening and so much more that we do not understand. But whatever answer one comes to after arguing about it in a respectful way what is really important is what happens after what some magicians might call this misdirection.

When Moses the writer of the law, and Elijah the greatest of the prophets appears representing two pillars of the Jewish faith we do not hear what they discuss with Jesus. But we can understand why they might be there in this moment. Not because of what they symbolize, but because like Jesus they too were men sent from God whom their own people originally rejected, and they too were individuals who had escaped death and are said to rather have ascended to heaven. If not them then who else could understand or even come close to understanding what Jesus was experiencing and what was about to happen to him?

As I said the disciples did the proper thing and offered their heroes and teacher some modicum of comfort while they had their meeting. But that is when a cloud from above descends and gives them a command. Seems like great timing that this cloud would appear right when Peter would make this offer, of building them a shelter.

That is because this cloud from God is showing them a better shelter than anything human hands could make. It is showing them that this shelter is God’s Son standing with them, and that they were to listen to him. To which then the light is gone, Moses and Elijah are gone and all that is left is Jesus telling them to “get up and not to be afraid.”

Christ told us in previous weeks when we looked at the Sermon on the Mount that he was not here to abolish the law, but rather fulfill it. With everything that was described in our Gospel today we see a further confirmation of this fact, with the law as Moses, prophets as Elijah and the voice of God appearing all at once and then disappearing as soon as the command is given, leaving Christ standing there alone. Because Christ was all of these things, God, the Law, the prophets, their purpose fulfilled and Christ is the living proof.

This is why his sacrifice for us, the good news of the grace he gives us, why the message we are tasked to share is so important. Because someone like Jesus, a perfect being, chose to live and die for us so that we can have salvation from the bondage of sin. That is what we will be talking about and what we will be examining as Lent comes to us in the next few weeks. And before we learn about the final days as Christ makes his way to the cross remember this scene, the truth of who Christ is to the world. A man who was God, a teacher, a friend, a brother, a son, a human being, and most importantly he was an innocent.

He showed the disciples and us in this passage the true magnitude of what his sacrifice was going to mean, and just exactly who was going to die for them and for the world.

This is a pretty short passage, but like I said there is really more here than meets the eye.

Amen.