

Transfiguration: A vision for Community Transformation
Matthew 17:1-9
Rev. Sharon Smith

“How will the world be different tomorrow as a result of our meeting today?”

Every small thing we do, matters.

Matthew describes the transfiguration of Jesus,

- that is the unveiling of Christ,
- that is the disciples' transformation...

As a vision (in verse 9).

It was an ordinary day when 4 friends climbed up a mountain.

For us it might be skiing or snowshoeing or hiking...

And they had a realization that day, that was so profound, that they wrote it up using the most evocative imagery and metaphor they had available to them as faithful Jewish people.

It was like the story our ancestors told when Moses came down from the mountain and his face was glowing and they couldn't look at him, he was glowing.

It was like the story of Elijah being taken up to heaven.

It was like the day of Jesus baptism. Where something in us, recognized something in him.

Something changed in their way of seeing... they were transfigured...
metamorphosed... transformed.

They saw Jesus as the Christ.
Declaration had become possibility.

Earlier, Matthew writes that Peter had declared: You are the Christ.
And before that a prayer they had been praying, a prayer Jesus taught them to pray:
May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven...

With each small utterance, with each word they had said...
they began to live into possibility.

And they entered into the tension.

The tension that every human organization faces:

- Do we preserve? Do we conserve? Do we hold onto what we have?
OR
- Do we lean into possibility? Do we risk transformation?

And the human Jesus touched them, and touches us and says:

‘Get up and do not be afraid.’

When human beings have a vision of what might be possible, we often respond in fear by:

- Revisiting our past and attempt to replicate what happened then. It gives us a handle when we face uncertainty...
The disciples want to build shelters or booths – oh Peter thinks it’s going to be just like the Exodus, when we lived in small tents or dwellings, its going to be like leaving Pharaoh (leaving Roman rule), how wrong he was...
 - Seeing our deficiencies, what we do not have, instead of what gifts we have all around us to make something happen. Matthew writes that the disciples come down from the mountain and immediately they are confronted by a boy who is having seizures and they were powerless.
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Peter Block, was born to Jewish parents, Ira and Dorothy Block. And he has given his life to **understanding how communities are transformed.**

He writes this:

- The hard part of building community is that it is always a custom job, it is born of local people, with unique gifts, deciding what to create together in this place. It is seldom replicable.
- In order for a community to be transformed, they need to change their conversation:
 - o The old conversations haven’t worked.
 - o Start having conversations you have not had before, in a way you haven’t tried before.
 - o Focus on gifts (what do we have) and not deficits.
 - o Everyone gets to think about the future together – it’s not given to the leaders to solve; people will be committed to what they have a hand in creating.

Peter Block goes on to say:

- We need to be weary of bringing our past into conversations about our future... he says that the past is a future that did not happen and wasn't going to happen. We need to be complete with our past.

And then he says...

- We must be willing to trade the action of problem solving and replace it with possibility. The answer to how is yes!
- Understand what possibility is: a declaration of what we create in the world each time we show up. It is a condition, or value, that we want to occur in the world. A possibility is brought into being in the act of talking about it.

And then we become the possibility, transfigured, transformation.

Community as belonging, by Peter Block

Peter interviewed a Priest from a small community.

Peter asked: Ever experienced community transformation? How did it start?

"So we came to Pentecost in 1992, and we read that passage in scripture from Acts about the Pentecost. Later at lunch, this woman says to me, "You said up there that Peter reading from the prophet book of Joel said that God's spirit fell down on all people, young and old, women and men." I thought, "Man, I'm a great preacher. It's a half an hour later, and she remembers what I said. I'm awesome." And I said, "That's right." She said, "So how come you don't treat people like that?" And I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, when people come to the church's food pantry, you ask people how poor they are. If you believe God's spirit pours down on all people, how come you aren't asking that?"

We started changing our questions. We started asking people about their gifts, the things they had to offer...

"Have you taken care of older folks? Have you taken care of children? Can you fix a toaster? Can you drive a car? Can you play a musical instrument? Do you sing? Have you cooked for more than 10 people?"

And we asked three questions at the end, "What three things do you do well enough you could teach somebody else how to do it? What three things would you like to learn that you don't already know? And who besides God and me is going with you along the way?"

One of the first people who came was a little woman who lived half a block from the church named Adele, and she told us she's a good cook.

So we said, "Prove it." She said, "What do you mean?" "Well, cook for the custodian, administrator, and pastor lunch on Friday."

So she cooked for us. It was great.

So leadership of the neighbor organizations group, said, "Don't eat somewhere else. Be here at the church and let Adele cook for you."

And she cooked for more and more and more things in the community. Studebaker Elementary at a PTA meeting, Health Center at an open house, at Memorial Hospital at a press conference all needed food.

Well, then the Chamber of Commerce called. "We want to have an all-day meeting of our leadership program in your church building." Well, we said, "That works. You can do that." They said, "Since we're going to be there all day, we need to use your kitchen."

We said, "Well, you can use our kitchen, but we would prefer you use our caterer."

So we took \$20 and bought her 1000 business cards. La Chaparrita Catering, spiced Mexican food, and she fed 70 business leaders in the community.

Now if we had asked her when she showed up, "Tell us how poor you are," we would have all ended up poorer for it, and we would've missed up on a lot of great food.

Transfiguration – metamorphosis - social transformation. Living into possibility.

It occurs in an infinite number of small steps.

So... how will the world be different tomorrow as a result of our meeting today?