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**Why God Does What God Does…**

**February 26,2017**

**Matthew 17:1-9**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from Jesus Christ, the transfigured one, who transfigures us still today, amen.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus is serious business. Transfiguration Sunday is considered by Churchy people to be like the third or maybe fourth highest Church Festival of the entire year, right below Easter and Christmas and either tied with or right below Pentecost. Personally, I have a hard time not giggling every time I read the story. My mind goes in one of two directions every time. I either imagine the kids toys and movies The Transformers. You know the trucks or cars that do a switch-a-roo and badda-bip-badda-bing they become superhero crime fighting giant robots. The other place my mind goes is, and I think someone could make a ton of money marketing this idea, I imagine Jesus as a glow in the dark nightlight helping kids to not be afraid of the dark or the boogie man in the closet or under the bed. Given these two images, how can a pastor convey the seriousness of this high Church day? By now you know me well enough to know I’m going to give it my best shot. So, here we go…

When I look back on my life there’s several times I can very plainly see God’s hand encouraging me, supporting me, and even causing me to change the direction my life was headed a time or two. It’s not nearly so easy to see God working in the present as you’re going through a crisis or a significant life event. I guess you could say the eyes of faith are 20/20 in hindsight… Even so, it’s much easier to tell **what** God’s doing than it is to tell **why** God is doing it. The thing that usually baffles me is why God does what God does. Questions like why does God allow bad things to happen to good people, or why God allows sin to persist. Why does God seem to answer some prayers with a great miracle and seems to ignore the earnest and heartfelt prayers of others… Why… Why… Why…

Wouldn’t it be great if you knew why God does the things he does, especially when it comes down to what’s going on in your own life? If your loved one had to be rushed to the emergency room, it would be so much more comforting to know why God allowed such a trial to take place in the first place. At least it would provide comfort and be a reminder that God is in control. There’s so many whys I’d like answers to. Why God lets some people die at a young age, or why God let’s death at times come in such a tragic way. It’s not always easy to figure out. When Jesus was here on earth, most of us understand from the Bible what was going on, and why. Why Jesus came to earth, why he let himself be crucified—we understand, he did that to earn salvation for us. Most of us have had that drilled into us from Sunday school to confirmation, to adult Christian education.

So, today we have before us the Transfiguration of Jesus. We can read the what happened on that mountain but the more important question is why and probably most important of all, why does it matter to me. Why is it relevant to you and me for our lives of faith today? The Bible spells out pretty clearly what happened that day up on the mountain, but not so much why it happened. We read in our text, “He (Jesus) took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.” Jesus prayed a lot. Particularly at special times in his life, Jesus would go off somewhere and pray. The next verse reads, “As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.” Keep in mind Jesus is both True God and True man. He’s not part God and part man. He’s not human while on earth and God when he’s in heaven. He’s 100% God and 100% man all the time. Don’t ask **how** that can be. We’re only talking about **why** today… Just trust me, Jesus didn’t give up being God when he became human. Rather, much of the time he simply didn’t use his godly powers. He didn’t show himself as God. However, for this one day, he did. He showed himself there as God. When he did, his body, even his clothes, become intensely bright, “Like a flash of lightning”, scripture says. That’s his holiness shining through. Most of the time Jesus looked just like anyone else. If he were sitting in a pew here this morning, you wouldn’t even know it was Jesus, not from his appearance, anyway. On the other hand, if he were sitting here in his transfigured form, you’d know immediately. You’d have to wear sun glasses just to protect your eyesight. Scripture gives us information on what happened, but I believe it is good to know also why the Transfiguration happened. I’m curious that way. Don’t you wonder just why he chose that moment to show his Divine nature? I believe that after you hear about all the why’s, you will not only understand Jesus better, but also you will yet again be able to see his love for you through the transfiguration.

Why did Jesus become transfigured at this particular time in his ministry? Would you believe that, for one reason, it was to strengthen Jesus in his resolve to go through with his mission? You would think the Son of God wouldn’t need strengthening, but remember he lived in the flesh. He got tired. He got hungry. He suffered as you and I might suffer. He also had to deal with doubts, uncertainties of every kind, and we know he even asked that his mission be taken from him at one time, when he said, “let this cup be taken from me.”

When Jesus went up to the mountain to pray, he had thoughts of his death on his mind. In the verses right before our Gospel, the Bible says, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Although Jesus was God, the flesh he wore made it difficult to complete his task. At the very least there was unease. You can be assured that one of the why’s of the transfiguration dealt with the strengthening of Jesus because of what Moses and Elijah had to say. Scripture says, “they spoke about (Jesus’) departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.” Therefore, it’s clear God the Father strengthened God the Son when the glory of the Lord renewed Christ’s strength. It helped Jesus as a man say with newfound strength later on, in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not my will but your will be done!”

For Peter, James and John, seeing Jesus that day in his glory as God, must have been a faith-strengthening experience for them. These three know now, without a shadow of doubt, Jesus is the promised Messiah, he is going to bring about salvation for all mankind. They might have wondered what Jesus was doing, and why he was not doing it quick enough for their taste. Later when Jesus is arrested, and put on trial and subsequently crucified, these three, the inner circle, Jesus’ closest friends, would experience tremendous fear and doubts. It will almost wipe out their faith, but the transfiguration of Jesus will still be in their memories. If Satan was convincing them, after Jesus’ death, that he was only a man, they can remember what they saw on the mountain that day when Jesus showed himself as God. They can remember the words of the Father saying, ‘This is my Son.” So if someone asks, “Why was Jesus transfigured in front of the three disciples?” We can know it was to give them strength for what would soon take place. We can also know that those disciples would remember and share with their brothers what they saw, so that even during their doubts they might have a light of hope to cling to in their own darkest hours.

Hopefully, I’ve convinced you why the Transfiguration happened for Jesus and for the disciples, but is there an answer as to why it happened for us as well? I think there is. For starters, the Transfiguration gives us strength to persist in our own faith journey just like it did for Peter, James, John, and the other disciples, but there’s so much more… As you look at Jesus on the mountain in shining glory, and you look with the eyes of faith, you can get a glimpse of yourself. Think about it, you get an opportunity here to see what you are going to look like in eternity. Scripture says in Philippians 3, “He will transform our lowly body so that (it) will be like his glorious body”, like the glorified body of Jesus. So in the transfiguration of Jesus you get a glimpse of the transformation that’s going to take place in you, when God takes you to heaven. I believe this happened to give us hope and to encourage us in the face of suffering and pain in this life.

May you gaze with your eyes of faith on the shining, glorified body of Our Savior and know that you too will someday obtain a body in the likeness of his glory. As you try to figure out why God does what God does in other areas of your life, may you find peace and comfort knowing this Jesus is God’s Son and he has given you and me a preview of coming attractions of what awaits all of us on the other side of the resurrection. I hope St Peter issues really dark sun glasses when we pass through the pearly gates… I’ve got a feeling we’re going to need them! Amen!