

February 3, 2008

The Change

It's hard to believe but we are already at the end of Epiphany, the third season in the church year. It began on January 6th with the celebration of the coming of the wise men. As you remember Epiphany means, "to make known". We've seen Jesus made known through the star, his baptism, his miracles, his teaching and his call. We finish this season today with his transfiguration. You heard the account to this remarkable event in both our New Testament and Gospel readings this morning. Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountain six days after he had told his disciples that he would go to Jerusalem suffer and die, but that on the third day he would be raised to life. At the top of this mountain a bright cloud engulfed them. Moses, who represents the law and Elijah, who represents the prophets, appeared and Jesus was changed or transformed into his heavenly glory. Mark records that at this time the disciples were filled with fear yet the glory of the moment overrode that fear and Peter offered to build some small houses for Moses, Elijah and Jesus so that they could just stay there and bask in their glory. Obviously this was not God's plan, because He interrupts Peter and speaks from heaven saying, "This is my son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased, listen to him." The result, they fell face down to the ground terrified. Let's focus on that for a moment. I hear a lot of people in America talking about being spiritual. They want to connect with the spiritual part of their life. They want spiritual fulfillment. What they are really looking for is some sort of warm cuddly feeling of assurance that all is well with them and their soul.

I guess you could say I have a problem with that. You see, if you go through the four gospels you will find that the most repeated quote of Jesus is, "Do not be afraid." When we come face to face with the ultimate spirit, that is God, we are frightened. Hebrews 10:31 makes this very clear, "it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Now why would that be? Very simply He is the Almighty, Holy, and God of all creation. In His presence we know we feel our inadequacies, our failures, our sin and our deserved reward, which is condemnation. Realizing this we also come to understand what Jesus himself told his disciples to preach, repent the

kingdom of heaven is near! Now let me repeat that Jesus gave his disciples the exact message he wanted them to preach. It wasn't god is love, Jesus loves me, it was repent the kingdom of heaven is near. In fact that's the same exact message that Jesus himself preached as he began his ministry in Matthew 4:17. Repent, change which is what that word means, why? Why change? They were in the presence of Jesus the Prince of Peace, the Son of God they're inadequacies, their failures, their sin, their deserved reward was eminent. They must change to be like him.

You know the message hasn't changed one bit. After all, Jesus did say that he would be with us always. He's here right now and when we really think about that we realize we need to change and that's such a comforting word isn't it? Nope, in fact if anything change scares the living daylights out of us. But I think that is an appropriate message that comes with Transfiguration Sunday. Just as Jesus was changed into his heavenly splendor, we too shall be raised to eternal life in glorious splendor. Now that has a lot of hope in it. But in the meantime while we sojourn here on earth and walk the path of life, we need to be changed into what Paul calls a new creation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we need to be transformed into a living child of God.

I received an e-mail a week ago that I think talks a little bit about that change; its' about a seminary professor who was vacationing with his wife in Gatlinburg Tennessee. One morning they were eating breakfast at a little restaurant hoping to enjoy a quiet little meal together. While they were waiting for their food they noticed a distinguished looking white haired man moving from table to table visiting with the guests. Professor leaned over and whispered to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here." Sure enough the man did come over to their table. "Where are you folks from?" he asked in a friendly voice. "Oklahoma", they answered. "Great to have you here in Tennessee", the stranger said. "What do you do for a living?" "I teach at a seminary", he replied. "Oh so you teach preachers how to preach do you? Well I've got a really great story for you." With that the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with the couple. The professor groaned and thought to himself "great just what I need another preacher story." The man started, "See that mountain over there? Not far from the base of that mountain there was a boy born to an unwed mother. He had a hard time growing up because every place he went he was always asked the same question; hey boy whose your daddy? Whether he was at school, the grocery store, and the drug store or even at church. He would hide at recess at recess and lunchtime from the other students, he'd avoid going into stores because the question hurt him so much. Even

when he was in church he tried his best to avoid the people especially after church because he was afraid someone would ask him. One day when this boy was in his teens the new preacher said the benediction so fast that the boy got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. Just about the time he got to the back door the new preacher, not knowing anything about him, put this hand of his shoulder and asked him, 'son who's your daddy'. Everyone around him got quiet. You could feel every eye in the church looking at him. Everyone would finally know the answer to the question. I don't have a daddy. The new preacher sensed the situation around him and using discernment that only the Holy Spirit said the following to that scared little boy. 'Wait a minute, I know who you are, I see the family resemblance now. You are a child of God.' With that he patted him on the shoulder and said 'boy you've got a great inheritance you go and claim it.' With that the boy smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. He was never the same again. Whenever somebody asked him who's your daddy? He would tell him I am a child of God. The gentleman got up from the table and said now isn't that a great story?" The professor responded that it really was a great story. As the man turned to leave he said, "You know if that new preacher hadn't told me that I was one of God's children I probably would have never mounted to anything." And he walked away. The seminary professor and his wife were stunned and they called waitress over and asked her, "Do you know who that man was?" The waitress grinned and said, "of course I do everybody knows him. That's Ben Hooper he's the former governor of Tennessee."

Now I share that story not because Ben Hooper made something of his life by becoming a governor but because Ben Hooper made something of his life when he realized he was a child of God. Then he lived as a child of God, he allowed the Holy Spirit to move in him as we heard in Acts 1:8; that Holy Spirit comes and gives power to be witnesses. What do you think Ben Hooper was doing when he went to those different tables? He was sharing his testimony, his witness, his father and our father because he's our heavenly father too and he's calling us to change and live as his children. Children who are happy to say my God is my father and I'm a child of God.

Change is it scary? Probably, but as we see on this Transfiguration Sunday it is glorious and that you can't count on.

In our Savior's name, Amen.