

## **“Light That Dazzles”**

*Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:1-11; Mark 9:1-9*

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

As you’ve probably heard by now, work has started up again at Five Loaf House, and we have our dedicated volunteers busy installing some new windows on the second floor. They’ve been adding some insulation in the process, and I’m told that, lo and behold, it’s making a huge difference in keeping the building comfortable. But as they’ve been working, from time to time they have come across some remnant of the history of the building. If you start pulling down an old wall or digging around in the basement of an old building like that, you never know what you might see. We have samples of all kinds of different wallpapers that were used in ages past, some of which are quite nice, and some of which are quite awful. We’ve found old light switches and milk bottles, an old toy box that probably dates to the 1920s at the latest, and even a pamphlet advertising the latest records for February 1921. There’s still work to be done, and I expect that there are still some treasures in there we haven’t yet seen.

Once you start looking in dusty, long-forgotten corners, you never know what you might find. That’s an idea we’ve mentioned before in these weeks since Christmas and Epiphany, that the light of Christ is shining in the world, and His light reveals all kinds of things about God and about us. We’re now at the last Sunday before the beginning of Lent, and during the season of Lent it seems as though the light begins to fail, as the darkness lashes out against the Light of the World. But today, the last Sunday before Lent, is a day when we tell the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, when that light shines unexpectedly brightly; it’s one last flash before the darkness grows.

And the thing about the Transfiguration is that it’s so unexpected. It really seems to come out of nowhere. No one was expecting it, it doesn’t seem to follow from any particular ancient prophecy of the Messiah, and in fact it apparently happened pretty much in secret and was kept a secret until after the earthly ministry of Jesus. It has some very definite parallels with the ministry of Moses and God giving His instructions to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, and it certainly serves to further establish Jesus as the promised Messiah and bringer of God’s kingdom, but it’s still pretty unexpected. It’s only witnessed by three of the disciples, so it’s not public at all. In fact it’s so unprecedented that we have a hard time describing it: Jesus’ appearance is “changed” or “altered,” and we practically have to invent a word to describe what this event involves. “Transfiguration” is a word that means, well, *this event*, and it doesn’t really mean anything else. It refers to an event that we weren’t expecting, weren’t looking for, and have a hard time grasping the meaning of.

So while it’s true that looking in dark, forgotten corners can reveal all kinds of things in life, the Transfiguration shows us that some things cannot be found by looking for them. Sometimes it takes the light of God coming to us unexpectedly, seemingly out of the blue, interrupting the stories of our lives, for us to learn the deep things of God’s kingdom and God’s character. There are things that can be gleaned or deduced from the world around us, but there are others that must be revealed to us by light breaking in from the outside. Some things cannot be found by looking; they can only be found by staying close to God.

Part of what makes the Transfiguration so hard to fit into the story is this command by Jesus to keep silent about it. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include the story of the

Transfiguration in slightly different ways, but they all conclude with this odd statement about how the few witnesses there were didn't say anything about it until much later. It's especially noteworthy here in Mark's gospel, because one of the unique things about Mark's telling of the story of Jesus is how often Jesus performs a miracle and then tells the people involved not to say anything about it. He'll cast out a demon or heal a leper in a clearly miraculous manner, and then tell them to keep it to themselves. There's even a name for it, "The Messianic Secret," and many biblical scholars have spent a lot of time arguing about what it means. It seems so strange to us, since the message of Jesus was meant to be spread. Part of the point of the gospel is that message of invitation and sharing, but here Jesus is deliberately and repeatedly limiting the number of people who hear His message. And that's what He does here at the Transfiguration.

But part of the logic of the Messianic Secret is that everyone is invited to participate in the kingdom, but the reality is that not everyone is ready to hear and receive that invitation. Jesus was being strategic in limiting His exposure, because He knew that His path would lead Him to opposition and death at the hands of those who opposed Him, and He doesn't want to begin that path until the time is right. He has been proclaiming light in the darkness, but the reality is that some people are invested in the darkness.

And more than that, even those who are interested in the light are sometimes dazzled by its unexpected brightness. The key to participating in Jesus' kingdom is faith, trust in Jesus as God's anointed one, and faith is different than being dazzled or impressed or entertained or wowed. When Jesus performs a miracle as a sign of the presence and power of His kingdom, the temptation we're likely to face is to get so amazed at the miracle itself that we stop there and don't pay attention to what that miracle is revealing to us about the kingdom of God. So when Jesus tells people not to talk about the miracles He's performing, at least part of the logic may be to help focus people on the miracle of God's presence, rather than the miracle of spontaneous healing. Rather than people following Jesus because they're amazed at the tricks He can perform, He wants them to put their trust in Him as the Messiah. Don't go around blabbing about the amazing healing, in other words, see the healing for what it is and put your faith in Christ.

And that is especially true here at the Transfiguration. We want to see the power and glory of God; Jesus transfigured and glowing and attended by Moses and Elijah is the Jesus we want to see. We want to see God present in power and knocking us over with His light. We like the thought of a God who banishes sickness and evil with a simple command. And there is nothing wrong with wanting that, because that is a true revelation of God. But He is a God who does not give us the glory and the majesty without also giving us Himself. Don't start blabbing about this glimpse you've had behind the veil, Peter, James, and John; don't get everyone worked up about the miracle unless and until they're ready to trust in the one bringing the miracle. Some eyes aren't ready to see the revelation because they're not ready to see the Revealer.

Part of the key for us to understand the Transfiguration is to notice how it ends. Not only does Jesus tell the disciples to keep it a secret, He tells them to do so "until the Son of Man had risen from the dead." The glory of God is revealed, and the affirmation of the Father is given — "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" — and then Jesus begins teaching on the cross. Glory and suffering, affirmation and humility, resurrection and crucifixion are paired together as God is revealed in Jesus Christ.

What matters is not so much our own effort at finding God. What matters is not how much digging and looking and searching we do for Him, because what really matters is God revealing Himself as He is. And in that case, what really matters is how open your eyes are to God as He really is and as He presents Himself. Our treasure is in jars of clay, as Paul says. If you can't handle a God who reveals Himself in humility and love, then you can't handle a God who reveals Himself in glory and power. If you can't handle a God who wraps Himself in human flesh, then you can't handle a God who wraps Himself in light. If you can't handle a God who walks in the dust and dirt of our cities, then you can't handle a God who makes the clouds His chariot. And if you're not ready to humbly love those who are different, outcast, and hated, then you're not ready for the glories of heaven.

And so today, on this last Sunday before we begin our Lenten journey toward the cross, we participate in the Lord's Supper together, yet one more way in which the glory of Christ is shown to us through humble means. This is the eternal God given *for us*. This is the body and blood of Christ given to us in secret, if you will; the magnificent grace of God poured out through the unexpected means of bread and juice. This is the work of God revealed in the coming together, the communion, of all of us humbly sharing one holy meal in Christ's name and receiving His grace together.



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