

"Heavenly Voice"

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February 23, 2020

Let's open our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, transform us in the brilliance of your love for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

A man dialed a wrong telephone number and heard the following recording: "I am not available right now, but I thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes."

A company in Switzerland turns the cremated remains of the dearly departed into a diamond of up to 1 carat in 6-8 weeks. A pound of ashes is enough to make a diamond; a human body leaves behind an average 5.5 to 6.6 pounds of ashes. The carbon, which makes up about 15% of the ashes, is subjected to extremely high pressure and heat which turns it into graphite and then, after more pressure and heat, into a diamond. The cost ranges from \$4,400 to \$16,700, depending on the size of the diamond. Wearing Grandma's diamond takes on a totally new meaning. Some might say it's transfiguration.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is about transfiguration, as is the children's story Cinderella. Leaf-eating caterpillars are transfigured in the cocoon to become butterflies, and water-breathing tadpoles are transfigured to become air-breathing frogs.

Transformation and transfiguration are similar; they both imply change, but in our gospel reading today, on Transfiguration Sunday, Jesus is physically transfigured and the disciples are spiritually transformed.

In the gospel according to Matthew, Jesus takes three of his closest disciples up a high mountain where Jesus is transfigured before them. The

three disciples are fishermen, Peter, James and John, who were among the first disciples asked by Jesus to "follow me" and they're the same three who accompany Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. On the mountain, the disciples see Moses and Elijah with Jesus, and then God speaks to them from a bright cloud with words very similar to when Jesus was baptised, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

This passage strongly echoes the reading from Exodus of Moses going up onto Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God. There's a high mountain, a mysterious cloud, a wait of six days, some disciples are there, the voice of God is heard and both Moses and Jesus take on a shining brilliance that's visible to others. The disciples are afraid, but both Moses and Jesus reassure them and talk to them. They're accounts of what happened to Moses and Jesus; and accounts of what happened to their disciples.

D.L. Moody, describes in detail the spiritual transformation of a prison inmate. "I was at the Fulton-street prayer-meeting, a good many years ago, one Saturday night, and when the meeting was over, a man came to me and said, 'I would like to have you go down to the city prison tomorrow, and preach to the prisoners.' I said I would be very glad to go. There was no chapel in connection with that prison, and I was to preach to them in their cells. I had to stand at a little iron railing and talk down a great, long narrow passageway, to some three or four hundred of them, I suppose, all out of sight. It was pretty difficult work; I never preached to the bare walls before. When it was over, I thought I would like to see to whom I had been preaching, and how they had received the gospel. I went to the first door, where the inmates could have heard me best, and looked in at a little window, and there were some men playing cards. I suppose they had been playing all the while. 'How is it with you here?' I said. 'Well,

stranger, we don't want you to get a bad idea of us. False witnesses swore a lie, and that is how we are here.' 'Oh,' I said, 'Christ cannot save anybody here; there is nobody lost.' I went to the next cell. 'Well, friend, how is it with you?' 'Oh,' said the prisoner, 'the man that did the deed looked very much like me, so they caught me and I am here.' He was innocent, too! ... I went round to nearly every cell, but the answer was always the same - they had never done anything. Why, I never saw so many innocent men together in my life ... I had got almost through the prison, when I came to a cell and found a man with his elbows on his knees, and his head in his hands. Two little streams of tears were running down his cheeks ... 'What's the trouble?' I said. He looked up, the picture of remorse and despair. 'Oh, my sins are more than I can bear.' 'Thank God for that,' I replied. 'What,' said he, 'you are the man that has been preaching to us, ain't you?' 'Yes ... I will explain; if your sins are more than you can bear, won't you cast them on One who will bear them for you?' ... Then I told him how Christ had come to seek and save that which was lost; to open the prison doors and set the captives free ... For a long time, the man could not believe that such a miserable wretch could be saved ... After I had talked with him, I said, 'Now let us pray.' He got down on his knees inside the cell, and I got down outside, and I said, 'You pray.' ... he lifted up his voice and said, 'God be merciful to me, a vile wretch!' ... Next morning, I felt so much interested, that I thought I must see him before I went back to Chicago. No sooner had my eye lighted on his face, than I saw that remorse and despair had fled away, and his countenance was beaming with celestial light; the tears of joy had come into his eyes, and the tears of despair were gone ... 'Tell me about it,' I said. 'Well, I do not know what time it was; I think it was about midnight. I had been in distress a long time, when all at once my

great burden fell off, and now, I believe I am the happiest man in New York.”

He was truly repentant and during the night, he was transformed.

Matthew says that Jesus underwent a *metamorphosis* – that’s the Greek word that he uses, and it’s translated as *transfigured*, perhaps so we don’t envision a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. The disciples become confused and afraid. Peter bumbles about making three dwellings for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. He was an impetuous fisherman and when in doubt, he wanted to do something. But this is where God intervenes, and points the disciples, and us, back to Jesus: “with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” The disciples immediately fall to the ground. God had spoken to them – the amazing, transformative experience of God’s heavenly voice! The gospel continues to describe amazing events that reinforce the transformation of the disciples. On Easter morning we’ll hear about the greatest transformation of all: when the resurrected Christ appears to the disciples and sends them forth to tell others about the good news that Jesus will be with them, and us, to the end of the age.

John D. Rockefeller, Sr., was strong and husky when he was young. He was determined to earn money and drove himself to the limit. At age 33, he earned his first million dollars. At age 43, he controlled the biggest company in the world. At age 53, he was the richest man on earth and the world’s only billionaire.

Then he developed an illness called “*alopecia*,” where the hair of his head fell out along with his eyelashes and eyebrows, and he was shrunken like a mummy. His weekly income was one million dollars, but he could eat only milk and crackers. He was so hated in Pennsylvania that he had to have bodyguards day and night. He could not sleep, stopped smiling, and enjoyed nothing in life.

The doctors predicted he would not live another year. His sleepless nights got him thinking. He realized with a new light that he "could not take one dime into the next world." Money was not everything. He repented of his sins and pleaded for God to change his heart.

The next morning, he awoke a transformed man. He began to help churches with his amassed wealth; the poor and needy were not overlooked. He established the Rockefeller Foundation to support medicine, education and scientific research. He began to sleep well, eat well, and enjoy life. The doctors had predicted he would not live past age 54. He lived to be 98 years old.

The sight of Jesus transfigured, and the sound of God's heavenly voice caused the spiritual transformation of Peter, James and John. The remaining Disciples were transformed when they saw the risen Christ. The Disciples shared the good news of the risen Christ and the generations that followed have been transformed by God's love through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Allow yourself to be transformed in the love of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.