

## **“You Are A New Creation” based on Matthew 17:1-9 and Psalm 2**

**Delivered by Pastor Drew Mangione, February 19, 2023, Shelby Presbyterian Church**

In the church I grew up in, at every baptism, we sang the same song afterward. Everyone sang to the child, “You are a new creation, in Christ you have been clothed. You are a new creation, forever you are loved.” The song has always stuck with me. In my head, I sing it a little at every baptism I’ve done, including today, as Lindsay and William were welcomed into the universal church.

In our tradition, we mark the seal of the Holy Spirit on a person when we baptize. We baptize children and infants because it emphasizes that this seal of the Spirit is not something we have earned, but a claim made by God through the church. Whether an adult or child, we believe the baptized are enfolded in grace, by a visible sign, the water. It represents being buried with Jesus and emerging as a new creation. Then this will all be made complete, when we are brought into the presence of God.

Today is a special day, because we, the family of believers at Shelby Presbyterian Church will have celebrated three signposts pointing us toward God’s project of new creation. We have already done Lindsay’s and William’s baptism, the first signpost, and later we will celebrate communion, another act of new creation. But right now, we will dwell on the signpost of the Transfiguration. It is on this Sunday before Lent every year that we remember that moment when three disciples saw Jesus changed before their eyes, in a preview of the resurrection that was to come.

The Transfiguration then serves as a preview and communion is for us a preview of the feast that is to come, the heavenly banquet, when all of God’s people, called out from every tribe and nation throughout the world will sit at table with each other in the presence of our God. John Calvin drew on some of the early church writers in saying, that this meal takes ordinary bread and wine...or grape juice...and through this collective act of faith, we are brought into the presence of the risen Christ, right now.

In the sacraments of Baptism and Communion, ordinary elements are made extraordinary. They are not destroyed in their humble essence to become something different. They are instead transformed, in that they reveal for us, like on that mountain top, the glory of the resurrection and the new creation it inaugurated. The sacraments offer a signpost the Kingdom of God we can touch. The sacraments draw us in and bolster our faith, as we take up our cross and follow Jesus on his path, sharing in his work to reconcile this world. Yes, even though we may die now, we have hope in the resurrection.

Six days before the Transfiguration, Matthew says, Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, and Peter refuses to believe that this is the way it is supposed to be. Jesus tells Peter to get in line behind him, calling him Satan, the adversary, because Peter does not understand yet what kind of messiah Jesus is. On the mountain then, it is as if Jesus is giving a preview where Peter and the disciples see Moses, the giver of the law, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, with Jesus. But this is not the actual new creation, it is just a foretaste of what is to come.

Peter wants to build tabernacles, or tents, which would serve as shrines to preserve it. He says, “It’s a good thing we’re here,” as if he has found his purpose, to make tents. Peter wants to make

this moment of rest and revelation his whole purpose. But we should never confuse a place of rest for our destination.

And so a cloud of light overshadows them, a phrase I love because clouds normally block light, but in this cloud, it is light, making the divine presence made visible. This is like in the Exodus when the presence was known in a pillar of fire creating clouds of smoke by day, and then as a light by night, as the Israelites escaped from Egypt. But in this moment also, Moses and Elijah disappear, because in Christ we find the whole of the law and prophets. Only Jesus remains, and a voice says, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am pleased. Listen to him."

Remember, Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but fulfill them. What Matthew shows us here is that Moses and Elijah come to Jesus and listen to him, because all scripture – the law, prophets, and writings – point to Jesus. In him, we see the fullness of God revealed, in the Father sending the Son, and anointing him with the Holy Spirit, bringing God down to us – all of humanity. This fulfills the call of Abraham's descendants to be a light to all nations, and make all things new by calling all people to him, to bear his light.

The Greek word we translate as Transfiguration is *metamorphoo*, which gives us metamorphosis in English. And apart from this scene, it appears in two of Paul's letters, Romans and 2 Corinthians. In neither place is it ever translated as transfiguration. That's because in each reference, it is used to describe our becoming a new creation in Christ.

In Romans, Paul says to "not be conformed to this world, but transformed (transfigured) by the renewing of our minds." And in 2 Corinthians, he writes of the veil being removed from between creation and new creation to gaze at the glory of the Lord as if in a mirror. By this we are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Lord, the Spirit.

We remain the same ordinary mortal beings that we are, but by the Spirit, we are changed. It's easy to get caught up in the good news being about going to heaven after we die. But the good news is that right now, we are being re-made in Christ's image. We are being changed because the Spirit of God is at work in and among us in the church. The Sacraments, then, are like the mountain experience, in that we catch a glimpse of the grace of our Lord Jesus, who despite being fully One with God the Father, came down to us, to live in our mortal flesh, and died for us, then rose again.

Christ became the true temple, the meeting place of heaven and earth, fully God and human. It was by grace, died for us, not because we deserve it, and not because God needed it to happen, but in order to share with us his inheritance as the eternally begotten Son of God. We receive his life which is abundant – all we need and more – and eternal.

My sisters and brothers, on this feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, my prayer is that we will all recognize God's presence here and understand Jesus' love for us. For it is by our creation, we bear the image of God, and by the Son's incarnation, and by his death and resurrection, we share in the Son's belovedness. The disciples received a glimpse of this, and saw it again, when the risen Christ remained with them 40 days, before ascending back to the right hand of the Father. And so, then Father and Son sent down the Spirit, to live in and among us, making us temples for this Holy Spirit to be with us, and transfigure us too.

Behold, you are a new creation, clothed in Christ and forever loved – remember this. The Spirit pours love in your heart. Let that love mold you to be the person you're called to be. Loving God and neighbor we can change this world, not by authority and victory, but by humility and love, in the ministry of reconciliation. Remember your baptism, when the Spirit claimed you. Adults, remember your profession of faith, when you responded to the Spirit's claim on you, by declaring your desire for Jesus to be your Lord.

Remember too, that in the Communion feast we will share to mark this holy day, we are brought into Christ's presence by faith with spiritual food for the journey. This is so that we do not lose our way and can find refuge in him, to be transformed.

You are beloved, and you have been set apart by God, made holy. Learn from Peter's mistakes, and don't confuse a moment of rest with the destination. Being a Christian is not a title, nor is it our purpose to claim that title. The gospel is meant to change us. Let the love of God change you. Do not resist the change God is making in you. Let the love being poured in your hearts, pour out to change the world for the better to reflect God's glory.

Trust that God is with you, and open your eyes to see grace, which is the unmerited favor you have with God in Jesus, through the Word and the Sacraments, right now, for you are a new creation, beloved by God. Amen.