

St. Giles' Episcopal Church  
February 14, 2010  
The Transfiguration of our Lord  
Luke 9:28-43  
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Every year on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday we hear an account of the Transfiguration of our Lord. Today we heard the record according to Luke's gospel. The same story is to be found in the gospels of Matthew and Mark. The Transfiguration is without doubt a major event in the life of Christ and in the experience of the disciples who were witnesses to it. It was an event of great importance to the faith of the first followers of Jesus and to those who came after them. And it is fitting to recall the Transfiguration as we prepare for the season of Lent. Let me give you the context of the Transfiguration in Luke's gospel to explain what I mean.

Jesus had asked his disciples what people were saying about who Jesus was. The disciples reported, "John the Baptist; but others Elijah; and still others that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God" (Luke 9:19-20). Peter declared correctly that Jesus is the Messiah. Luke's gospel goes on to say that Jesus then told his disciples, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed" (Luke 9:22).

Then Jesus teaches the disciples what discipleship means: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

The Transfiguration follows, eight days later. Jesus takes Peter and John and James up the mountain to pray. The glory of Christ was there made visible to these disciples, his face changed and his clothes becoming dazzlingly white. And God spoke the same words to Jesus that were spoken by God at Jesus' baptism by John: "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!" (Luke 9:35). Matthew's gospel reads, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 17:5b).

So the revelation of Christ's glory and of God's love for Christ happens in the context of the suffering Jesus will endure. And in the context of what Jesus does immediately when he comes down from the mountain. Jesus heals the epileptic son of a father beside himself with worry because of the way the unclean spirit mauls and torments his child. Jesus, never forgetting the suffering awaiting him, keeps on healing the sick, thereby revealing the greatness of God.

My friends in Christ, I hope all of us have had moments when we have known the glory of our Lord – in the sacrament of the altar, in music of praise, in the beauty of God's creation, in the eyes of another, in the quiet assurance in our hearts of God's love for us. I hope we have had these moments so that, knowing Jesus as Messiah in his glory we may have the courage to follow him, to come down from the mountain and take up our crosses to follow Jesus and do what Jesus did.

Lent is a season when the church calls each of us to consider what discipleship means for us, what we can do to show in our lives the love we have for our glorious Lord. This Lent at St. Giles we have many opportunities to deepen our faith, strengthen our connections to one another, and live out our care for the world.

First, we have the Ash Wednesday service this week. I urge you to attend this service, which will be preceded by a Lenten supper and time of fellowship. The Ash Wednesday service stands out as a true gem in the Book of Common Prayer, rich with wisdom and insight into the ways of sin and into the ways of God. Let the wise words written by our fellow Christians capture your hearts and lead you closer to God. Join one another to come before God in humility and in faith this Wednesday.

We will also have a Bible study class this Lent, beginning tomorrow evening. Details of this will be given during announcements. What I want to say now is that Lent is a perfect time for deepening our knowledge of Holy Scripture. The Episcopal Church affirms the importance of Holy Scripture, the Old Testament and the New Testament, as the foundation of our faith. This is a good season for growing in our understanding of the Bible.

During Lent we will be reviving the St. Giles' custom of having Lenten friends – again, there will be more information about this at announcements. What is so important about this is daily prayer for one another. We regularly pray for one another on Sundays, in the Prayers of the People. But do we all remember to pray for one another every day? And do we remember that all of us need the prayers of one another all the time, not only when we are ill or in distress? We do need one another's prayers! And we need to be reminded that praying for one another is part of living out Christ's call to deny ourselves and to follow him.

During Lent we will also be offering a healing service on a week night in March. Details of this will be announced when they have all been settled. The healing ministry of the church is a clear extension of Christ's ministry on earth. This morning's gospel

lesson makes it clear that offering healing to the afflicted is the work of God. We are meant to continue this work, and we will be doing that for the people of St. Giles and for any of our friends who will join us.

Finally, we must never forget the words of Jesus at the conclusion of the parable of the sheep and the goats found in the gospel of Matthew. “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’” (Matthew 25:35-36; 40).

We at St. Giles have two opportunities during Lent to care for those in need. At the General Convention of 2009 the national Episcopal Church reaffirmed and strengthened its commitment to the work of the church’s outreach organization, Episcopal Relief and Development. The first Sunday of Lent was designated as a time for all parishes to take a collection to support the work of ERD. If you were here when the Bishop visited us in January, you know that he recommended that our support for Haiti be made through ERD. Our vestry has agreed that the loose plate collection next week, February 21<sup>st</sup>, will be given to ERD, specifically for Haiti relief. I urge you to prepare for this collection and to give generously to help those who are certainly among the least of the members of Jesus’ family.

Next week we will also begin a weekly collection for the local food pantry. Again, the vestry has supported this outreach effort of St. Giles’ Church. I encourage

every one of you to bring one item of nonperishable food each week for the food pantry. The collection of food will be brought forward every Sunday with our offerings of bread and wine and money, to be blessed and to be a reminder that we are called to care for those less fortunate than ourselves, because we are called to show God's compassion in the world, daily and weekly, in the name of Christ.

Jesus calls us all to make ever greater room in our hearts to love God and to serve God and one another. This Lent let us open our hearts and pray that the Holy Spirit may inspire and strengthen us to do the work of our Lord, who was glorious on the mountaintop, glorious on the cross, and glorious in the garden of the empty tomb.

Amen.