

The Feast of the Transfiguration
Luke 9:28-36
August 6, 2006

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. The Greek for transfiguration is *metamorphoo*, *meta* referring to change and *morphe* referring to form. Changing form. Metamorphosis is changing form, not changing identity.

Metamorphosis happens in the animal world all the time. Frogs metamorphose. From the egg emerges a tadpole, which lives in the water, breathes with gills, and has a tail. As the tadpole grows, lungs and legs form, and the gills and tail are absorbed into the body. Finally, the animal leaves the water and lives mainly on land, as a frog. In the whole process, the DNA of the frog is the same. The frog is essentially frog, despite what appears on the outside. It is true to what it was meant to be.

Butterflies metamorphose. An egg turns into a caterpillar, and the caterpillar completes its metamorphosis inside the pupa, or chrysalis, where the tissues and organs of the caterpillar break down into a soupy liquid, and then reassemble into the tissues and organs of the adult butterfly. It's really amazing! Cells known as the imaginal discs remain complete, and the adult butterfly's structure takes shape as directed by these cells and by hormones. When its development is complete, the adult butterfly splits the pupal shell and crawls out, unfolds its wings and pumps blood into the veins, and then holds the wings spread out like a kite until they dry and harden. The whole time this process is going on, the DNA of the butterfly is the same. The butterfly is essentially butterfly, despite what appears on the outside. It is true to what it was meant to be.

From the ordinary to the sublime, from butterflies to the Christ, metamorphosis happens. Jesus changes before the very eyes of his friends, yet Jesus remains the same. Jesus takes all that he has been, and brings it to a glorious moment when he sees the face of God unveiled. He brings all he is, and sees it new. And he is strengthened to set the course of his life, true to who his essential self, true to what he was and is and is to be.

I wonder what Jesus was thinking that day, that day when he asked some friends to go with him up a mountain. I wonder if he was looking over his life, remembering a simpler, ordinary existence as a carpenter from a small town. Maybe he was looking back over all that had happened through him: healing those who were lame and maimed and blind, and feeding thousands of people from a few loaves of bread. He had even been identified by both Mary of Bethany and by Peter as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Maybe he was questioning what it would mean to actually be the Christ. Such musings would surely have pushed him to prayer.

And to prayer he went. Jesus asked a few close friends to join him in a climb up a mountain, where they could pray uninterrupted.

And astonishing things interrupted that prayer.

In a moment, Jesus was changed. Jesus changed form. One might say that his solid body became an energy body. He was radiant! Dazzling! His face didn't reflect the sun; the brightness from a thousand suns emanated from him. And the disciples saw, for that split second, the unveiled face of God! They saw Jesus beaming, glittering, drenched in God, and, as a poet said, "holding joy like a flaming sun in his hand."

In the next moment, Jesus' friends saw him speaking with two men – Moses, emblematic of the law, and Elijah, representative of the prophets, two Old Testament men who did not die. They were there to acknowledge who Jesus was – the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, the Christ indeed.

Suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed these friends. They couldn't see or touch or smell this amorphous, ambiguous "stuff." They were immersed in it!. And a voice sounded. It came rumbling through their ears and skin, reverberating from every direction into the core of their being. "This is my Son, my Chosen, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." They all go the message.

When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone, the same Jesus. As though nothing had changed. And nothing had changed, but everything was different.

Could there be a more definitive statement of the meaning of Jesus' life? Could there be a more splendid demonstration of who Jesus always had been and who Jesus was yet becoming? Certainly this affirmation of his purpose in life gave him the strength to go on. From that transfiguring moment on the mountaintop, Jesus walked down from the mountain and got back to the work of healing. And he set his face toward Jerusalem, to be all that God meant for him to be.

Of course, not all transfiguration is so glorious and dramatic as Jesus'. I wonder how yours is going. How is your transfiguration story developing? How is your journey into becoming all of who God means for you to be? Maybe for you it's not one defining moment, but a slow, constant process – like the butterfly. (Or maybe like the frog!)

Metamorphosis might come from the hard work of paying attention to the unconscious part of yourself, bringing more of your unconsciousness into consciousness, and making you more aware of your whole self and be better able to choose your right path.

Transfiguration may come in becoming a bride or a groom, or a parent, or a grandparent. Life changes radically, and you are still the same, though different. To the new you, you bring your old baggage and habits, to have them examined in new light, and to make choices about what kind of parent or spouse you will be.

We can't throw away the past. There is no "out there" where we can throw parts of ourselves. We are who we are – who we have been and who we will be. The DNA doesn't change, and we can't dispose of dangerous or painful aspects of ourselves and our history. We can only know their presence and how they tend to function. If we work at it we may be able see those dark elements transformed from something virulent into

something manageable. Exposed to light, we can better see the potentiality for evil in our own souls, and make choices about how to live.

Metamorphosis happens. It is a powerful and frightening experience. It means loss of the old and embracing fully all that God intended you to be.

What keeps you from those transfiguring moments? Do you hesitate to go into the unknown? Have you avoided living into the mystery of life, trying rather to break it into smaller, solvable problems and do-able projects?

Have you been in a cloud, trying futilely to crash through it by dint of will and determination, when God is simply asking that you sit in the stillness and listen? Do you truly trust Christ as your Guide? If you lack trust in God, you also lack that peace of God that passes all understanding.

When you dare to be all God meant you to be, you will not find that life is easy. It certainly wasn't easy for Jesus. You will find parts of yourself that you didn't know existed. You'll walk paths that the world finds odd. And your life will be meaningful, deeply satisfying, and your joy will be deep.

May God remove from our lives all that blinds us to seeing the potential God has placed in each of us. May God grace us with the ability to transcend the fear. May we find in the brightness of God's face willingness to be transfigured into all God wants us to be.

Amen.