

Last Epiphany
St James and Good Shepherd, Laconia, NH
The Rev. Dr. Janet Lombardo
March 2, 2025

Transfiguration (*The Emperor's New Clothes*)

When I was a child, I enjoyed the story of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, by Hans Christian Andersen. If you remember, the story went like this. The Emperor loved fancy things, especially clothes, and spent lavishly on them. Two weavers, con men who had come into town, offered to weave the Emperor an exquisite garment made out of the finest cloth, that could only be seen by those who were competent and wise. The weavers go through an elaborate ruse to make the Emperor's new clothes. Everyone, wanting to be seen as competent and wise, fawns over the beautiful new clothes, as no one wants to be seen as incompetent or stupid. So, the ruse continues, until one day the Emperor wears the beautiful clothes in a parade, and a child asks, "Why is the Emperor naked?". The Emperor, seemingly unfazed, continues the parade as if nothing was said, but everyone now knows that he is indeed naked.

This story strikes me as a story for our time. I will let you cast the characters, but it seems to me that we need to be like the child – calling things as we see them, calling things as they are, no matter whom we make uncomfortable. The truth is getting murkier and murkier, and we need to proclaim the light and love of God.

To me, this story is also connected to our gospel reading on this last Sunday of the Epiphany, the story of Jesus' transfiguration. Jesus is fully revealed to the disciples on that mountaintop, they see him for who he truly is. Jesus' appearance changes, as if he was lit from

within. In those few moments, Jesus' true nature is revealed for all to see. The light of God within Him shines out in such radiance that it is hard to even imagine.

How are we to make sense of this seemingly impossible event? How does the transfiguration affect us today? How does this give us hope in times of despair, in times of great need?

The disciples were about to embark on a very difficult journey with Jesus. It would not be a road that they expected, and just like us, bad things often came as a shock. They could not possibly have guessed that their Jesus would be tortured and crucified. But they will had this mountaintop moment, this time of revelation, this time of transformation to hold onto, when all else seemed to go wrong.

This is God's promise to us, that no matter what happens, that God will be present with us. No matter what life brings our way, our God, our incarnate God, is there with us. The promise is, no matter how dark the moment, no matter how deep the despair, that God is with us. God, transfigured on the mountaintop, is present to us, even when we are not expecting it, even when it seems impossible. God's promise is to be there for us. This is the reason for the transfiguration, so that we will know, as the disciples knew, that all things are possible with God. The transfiguration offers us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God, a glimpse of how things could be, if we just open our eyes to the glory of God around us and speak the truth.

Immanuel means 'God with us' – the transfiguration is here to remind us of that fact, to remind us as we walk into Lent and Holy week, that we need not be afraid, for God is with us.

To remind us that whatever we face in life, that God is with us, in our joys, and most especially in our sorrows.

Thank God for these mountaintop experiences, and although we can't stay in them, they give us much comfort and support on our journey. They give us light in the darkness and hope in a seemingly hopeless world. This is why this reading closes out the season of Epiphany. This is why the church puts this reading right before the season of Lent – a season of Jesus incarnate, a season of hope and promise of what is yet to come. So, with renewed strength, let us forge ahead, knowing that no matter what happens, God is with us, always and forever. It is up to us to speak the truth, to let God's light shine forth, no matter what the cost.

Amen