

## Seeing Jesus for the First Time

The Transfiguration ~ Exodus 24:12-18 & Matthew 17:1-9

Rev. James C. Ramsey ~ March 2, 2014

Transfiguration" sounds like a required class Harry Potter might be forced to take at Hogwart's School of Wizardry and Witchcraft. It could be a class where you learn how to turn a stone into a toad, an apple into a bag of diamonds or yourself into a snow leopard. For Harry Potter fans, transfiguration is all about magic.



THE Transfiguration of Jesus comes across as magical, but it's much more than a wizard's trick.



Peter, James and John had traveled with Jesus, eaten with him, watched him teach and preach and heal. They had seen him, they might have thought, from every possible angle. But up on the mountain, with Jesus surrounded by the glory of God, and flanked by the patriarchs, it was like seeing Jesus for the first time.

If you know the stories of the Old Testament, you will see allusions to the books of Daniel, 2 Kings, Deuteronomy, Malachi, and more. These are stories where God's holiness intrudes into the ordinary world. Because Elijah appears with Jesus, we cannot help but recall Elijah's fireball-bright entry into heaven.

These “reminders” serve to tell us...again, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the “messiah” who embodies the plans, the dream, the Good News of God. The disciples had seen Jesus – but on this day the eyes were opened in a new way.

Jesus was changed, transfigured before them. They noticed that. They saw differently...in a way that changed them.

After this mountaintop story, where earth and heaven touch in conversation, we are guided (with the disciples), unwillingly, down the mountain with Jesus. We will enter the season of Lent. Down the mountain and back to the cruel world, down the painful trail to betrayal, arrest, and public execution. But before we go there, we are prepared. We learn that Jesus was not like the countless others who carried a Roman cross. Jesus was different. His way of walking his talk, to death and beyond if necessary, was blessed by God.

Here is the ‘Transfiguration’ You may have thought this Nazarene rabbi, all ratty hair, worn sandals, and calloused hands, was ordinary, or maybe just vaguely special. Well this is what God thinks of him, watch this! Tada!! Transfigured. See him for a moment in this dazzling state and realize who Jesus really is.

Even if we have known Jesus for a long – it’s like seeing him for the first time...as he really is.



How do you perceive Jesus?  
Will you go to the mountaintop with him?  
How might he be inviting you to see differently?  
What in your life needs transfiguring right now?  
Are you willing to allow Jesus to transform your heart?

Transfiguration happens in the real world...it can happen in the midst of our real life...and our vision becomes transformed.

Desmond Tutu, the South African bishop and peace activist says of Transfiguration that it happens all the time, and in the strangest of places: from the 'transfiguration' of winter brown grass into the lush bright green of spring grass, to the 'transfiguration' of a white defender of 'apartheid' into a 'brother



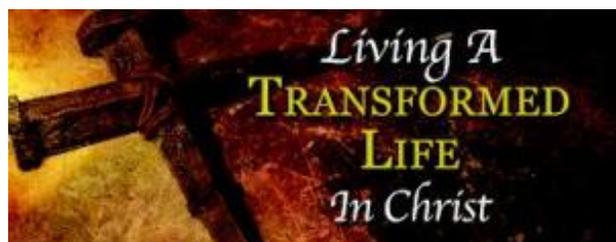
whom God loves just as much as God loves me'. For Bishop Tutu, Transfiguration is for us, more than for ancient disciples. It is full of promise and salted with hope.

Tutu described the process of voting for the first time as transfiguring – all his life he had lived under the oppression of apartheid. He says, “one walked into the voting room, marked the ballot, walked out, put it into the ballot box and left transformed from being ordinary to “one who counted”.

What a transforming notion – that you are one who counts. This morning we will break the bread and lift the cup together as we remember Jesus Christ the Son of God -- crucified and resurrected for the world. Each of us is invited to this meal, because in God's eyes, we count. Here, at Christ's table, eyes are opened and spirits lifted. We'll bite the bread, taste the juice, and...

What happens next? Will this meal...this glimpse of Jesus, help us see things differently?

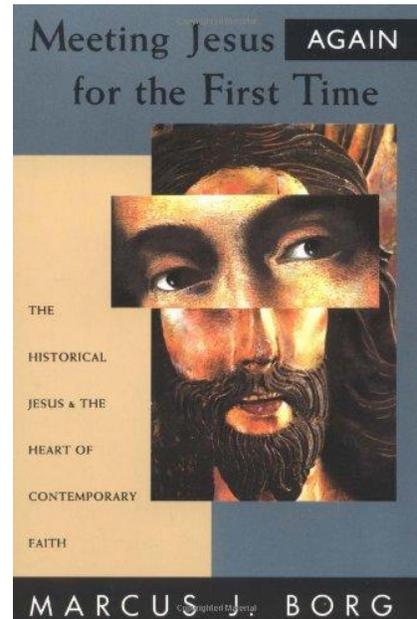
Will you be guided by your vision to live large and bold for God's kingdom? In Jesus name can we bring healing and hope, can we learn to be agents of truth, compassion, justice. Can we be seers, knowing how and when to recognize Jesus not only in broken bread but especially in broken lives?



Come to the table and let your eyes be opened. Realize that Jesus is not what you thought. He's not in just in the past. But he's here among us.

Theologian Marcus Borg wrote the book "Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time." He researched scholarly work on the historical Jesus, but mixed in his own faith experience, his sense of Jesus as he has grown and matured since his childhood.

Many of us know the stories of Jesus. We know what the church teaches about him. We are familiar with the creeds and confessions. But Borg comes to the conclusion that "Believing in Jesus does not mean believing doctrines about him, rather, it means to give one's heart, one's self at its deepest level, to . . . the living Lord...



For, ultimately, Jesus is not simply a figure of the past, but a figure of the present. Meeting that Jesus—the living one who comes to us even now—is like meeting Jesus again for the first time."