

**Last Sunday After The Epiphany – February 18, 2007
Ascension Episcopal Church, Hinton, WV
Luke 9:28-36,[37-43a] - Transfiguration**

The Rev. Kent Higgins

Paul's epistle to the church at Corinth contains a very moving passage: "11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." 1

Familiar words that, in typical Hebrew writing style, offer parallel images of what it is like to have your life and your person transformed by the love of God. That is exactly what happens to Moses, and to Jesus himself in the Old Testament and Gospel lessons. Taken together, they are examples of "transfiguration," but transfiguration is not limited to the Bible – it occurs routinely in our lives.

Understand that love, like life itself, is a gift of God. When we encounter the overwhelming power of love, it is seen in our faces, and others see it in us.

That's what happens with Moses who is returning to the people of Israel with the tablets testifying to the covenant agreement into which he has just entered. Moses is literally glowing from his experience of the love of God.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is on the mountain with Moses and with Elijah, the great prophet. It is Elijah, you will recall, who is carried up into heaven in a chariot of fire. These two men embody "the law and the prophets," the basis for

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. 1 Co 13:11

Jewish life. Their presence points to the greatness of Jesus, but if there is any doubt, a cloud surrounds Peter, John, and James, and from the cloud comes the voice of God, ““This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!””²

Moses and Elijah and Jesus have in common at least these things:

- They have seen God face-to-face;
- They have been the recipients of God’s redeeming and transforming love; and
- They have suffered in doing the work God asks them to do.

And despite the suffering, they couldn’t be happier, because they are giving of themselves to others, which is what God intends them to do. Focusing especially on Jesus, he will suffer on the cross and die for our sins, the one sacrifice to God which is sufficiently worthy to earn salvation for us all. That, my friends is love. That is giving up everything in love for friends.

Even now, in our day and time, we can all think of a time when someone we knew truly glowed from happiness, or when it happened to us ourselves.

My Grandfather Higgins was completely and totally in love with my grandmother. In many ways in their lives together, he had been a disappointment to her – not so successful in business as he might have been. Her status in society was a function of his success, and it wasn’t all that she wanted. Sometimes it seemed that nothing he did was good enough, but Stanley Higgins had a spirit within him that was openly generous to all, and when he spoke of his wife, you could see in his face the love he felt for her. Never mind that she had been

² Luke 9:35, *New Revised Standard Version*.

unhappy about something. Never mind that there had been some hard words spoken. He could look at her with adoration, and that love offset everything else.

And there were times when Jim Higgins, would look up with a shy smile and acknowledge that she loved him just as much as he loved her.

Gail and I knew a couple who for all intents and purposes lived separate lives together. They bickered. They disagreed. He actually would write her a note saying at what time he wanted lunch served and leave it out for her to find. But when he spoke to others about her, his countenance changed, because in truth he loved her with all his heart. His face was transformed.

Have you seen or felt this inner glow, at least a little of it? I think most of us have. It is a precious gift.

In the Epistle, Paul speaks directly to us and to all congregations of believers when he says that each of us has gifts given to us by God. Those gifts are sure and certain signs of God's love for us. But no one of us has all the talents needed to accomplish God's mission for us. That accomplishment depends on our working together.

Understand this: it is when we share our gifts with others that we are loving them. We have to actively give up something that is part of us; we have to exercise our gifts of the Spirit as members of a community. Only then are we complete.

If we do not share our gifts with one another, we are a “noisy gong or clanging symbol.”³

³ 1st Corinthians 13:1 *New Revised Standard version.*

And here is where the lesson lies, for Paul says: “⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”⁴

The complete has come. We are no longer children, but adults. We now see clearly, and it benefits us only when we give away what we have to one another and to those in need. “⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,⁵” is not just good advice – it is the essence of love.

Again in the words of Saint Paul: “⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

When we accept the love of God into our lives, we are transfigured, and for that we say, “thanks be to God.”

⁴ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. 1 Co 13:4

⁵ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Mt 6:19