

### **Problem: How does mystery and faith change us?**

-As many of you know, Abby and I were on vacation this past week in San Francisco. Our six days in CA were jam packed with what seemed to be maximizing our time with family to the max. Long drives in the car, watching the clock to make sure we had enough time to get to another family/friend function, zeroing in on meaningful conversation with those who we were with. It was very restful.....or not. Maybe you can relate to this hustle and bustle with visiting your own families living in other places.

-Even though our trip was jam packed, it was incredibly worthwhile. Since I am one of the few “believers” in Abby’s extended family, I get approached with some really enjoyable and unique questions. I had a wonderful over-an-hour discussion/debate with Joel, who is married to one of Abby’s cousins at a family party. Joel is a wonderful, soft spoken, and patient person who, like many millennials, calls himself a secularist. Our discussion highlighted a ton of things that we both have in common: being a good person, treating others and the earth with respect, sticking up for those who can’t stick up for themselves. But, one element that we had a pretty different take on was the subject of mystery. Joel made it quite clear that it wasn’t like he didn’t accept mystery as he said there are and always will be things beyond our human comprehension and understanding. However, if I understood him correctly (and I did get his permission to use this example in my sermon this morning), mystery for Joel wasn’t something that, in his words: “has much to do with living his life in as full of way as possible.”

-I really appreciated this discussion with Joel because it made me think more deeply on the subject of mystery and the role it plays in my own life.

-Enter the weird story of this rabbi going up a mountain with some fisherman, lighting up like a christmas tree, talking with some other dead prophets, and then coming down the mountain telling these fisherman to tell noone of this experience. This story, the story of the Transfiguration as the church historically calls it, has a lot of mystery to it. A lot of it doesn’t make sense on the surface. So, does it matter? Or doesn’t it? What does mystery mean in this story and maybe most importantly, what role does mystery have in our own lives?

### **Solution: Moments of mystery help us keep going in life.**

-The word that we know of as “transfiguration” in this text is the Greek word: *metemorphōthē*. This is where we get the english word “metamorphosis” which the webster dictionary defines as: “a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means.” Whenever I read this word I can’t help but think of the show *Power Rangers* and have to laugh a little bit at the image of Jesus as a Power Ranger “metamorphosing” into some mid 90’s transformer toy.

-In all seriousness, Jesus “metamorphosing”, or changing forms is something that is mysteriously foreign, that doesn’t make sense on the surface. But does it instill a

curiosity to go deeper? Interestingly, Webster's dictionary also points out that *metamorphosis* can mean: "the process of transformation from an immature form to a more mature form in two or more distinct stages."

-With this in mind, I wonder can the mystery of the transfiguration be more about us going deeper and changing than Jesus about Jesus changing?

-When I was training in seminary and worked as a hospital chaplain, I and my seminary colleagues were driven by the mystery of healing. We had a little competition about who could visit the most amount of patients and how many of those patients would "get better". The whole working theory was that we believed, in some weird way, that we were "spreading God's healing": we were the ones who were teaching these patients about faith and hope. This little competition went about halfway through the summer until one of my colleague chaplains had a sudden death on her floor. A 65 year old woman was to be released the next day from having a very successful recovery from heart surgery suddenly had a stroke and died in her sleep. My colleague was devastated as she counseled the patient and family for quite a while. In one of our group meetings, she blurted out: "this woman and her family did all the right things. I promised them healing and now look at where they are?" Our supervisor calmly but assertively asked: "Is that what you think your job is? I'm sorry to disappoint you, but your job is not to teach the patients healing, but for the patients to teach you healing. It's not about what you bring them, but what they can bring you. That's why you are here." Suddenly my world was turned upside down: I was the one being healed. I was the one being transformed. I was the one being curious and going deeper and being metamorphosed.

-Maybe this is what Transfiguration Sunday is supposed to be about: being fueled by the mystery not of Jesus transforming, but our own transformation. How has the mystery of God transformed you?

-If you think about it, this Sunday is a bridge Sunday. We have come through the birth of Jesus (Christmas), the Baptism of Christ, the Magi following the star to Bethlehem (Epiphany) and now we are here. This Wednesday (Ash Wednesday) begins the season of Lent and the journey to Easter. It's a time for us to maybe take stock of the question: how have you been transformed up to now? How have you matured? What mystery maybe drives you into deeper transformation that can keep you going?

**Implication: What mysteries are you pursuing in your life right now?**

-We know that one of the OT testament stories this transfiguration story plays off of is the story of Moses and the 10 commandments. Moses going "up the mountain" and "glowing" because he was in the presence of God. One difference I believe that is important to notice between Moses in the OT and Jesus is that Jesus is not alone! He brings others into the mystery, despite the fact that they are slow on the uptake and

“don’t get it” much of the time. I see myself in that camp a lot. That for me is really comforting.

-In some contrast to Joel’s take on mystery, I believe mystery has a big part to play in our lives on earth, especially in a life of faith. Mystery has the capacity to transform us into deeper individuals and yes, deeper communities by wrestling and walking together.

-May we together be driven by mystery, driven to go a little deeper, driven to wrestle with the things we don’t understand, driven to be metamorphosed into deeper children of God. Amen.