

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, March 2, 2025
"The Wonder and Mystery of Transfiguration"

Young at Heart Message

Earlier this week while I was driving, I noticed that my back windshield was so dirty, I couldn't see cars in my blind spot because I couldn't see through the parts of the windshield that didn't get wiped by the back wiper.

So, I decided that it was time to get my car washed.

Everyone else must have had the same idea, because I waited in line for 45 minutes!

But, I finally got through the car wash, and promptly moved on with my day.

I headed to the gym, worked out, and when I left the gym, it took me a minute to find my car.

I didn't even recognize my own vehicle because it was shining so vividly blue.

I had become accustomed to the dirty brownish colour that my vehicle had become over the winter.

It was covered with months worth of dirt and grime from the wet and slushy snow and the pickle mix that they tend to spread here in Calgary.

After it had been washed, all of that grime had come off. My car quite literally sparkled in the sunlight.

Compared to the other vehicles around mine, it was definitely shining the brightest.

I have to imagine that if the other cars could speak, they would be jealous of how clean mine looked!

In light of the transfiguration stories that we heard today, I started thinking about how brightly my car shined after the dirt and grime and other things that were muting its light had been washed away.

I began to wonder what we might be (metaphorically) holding onto or layered with that might be preventing *us* from shining.

For example, Moses held onto a lot of insecurity and anxiety about his ability to speak on behalf of his people.

He held onto so much of this insecurity that God tells Moses to have his brother Aaron speak on his behalf.

Moses also holds onto uncertainty, along with quite a bit of frustration over the complaints of the Israelites after they leave their slavery in Egypt.

So, by the time he climbs Mount Sinai and talks with God on this occasion, he is pretty bogged down with his own “stuff” that’s preventing his light from shining.

Moses comes down from Mount Sinai after talking with God and has no idea that his skin is shining.

Aaron and all the Israelites are afraid to come near him because of his dazzling appearance.

However, we know, from another part of this story, that Moses—tucked away in the cleft of the rock—only saw God’s back.

“You shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen” (Exod. 33:23).

So Moses isn’t shining because he saw God on the mountain. *Moses is shining because God saw him.*

All of this begs the question, then: what might be bogging us down or holding us back from shining so brightly?

What needs to be “washed away,” or what might we need to let go of in order for our light to shine as brightly as Moses or Jesus after being seen by God?

I’d like to take a minute to create our own list of the things that might be preventing our light from shining.

Our AV people will type our responses in for us.

Feel free to just throw your thoughts out.

These can be generic things, or something you might actually be holding on to that you feel you could let go of.

The Message

I wanted to create this list together because, as many of you know, I took a brief personal retreat this week.

Some of you may remember during my sermon last week, I shared a story called "Acornology," in which we talked about acorns needing to be planted in order to become their "True, Oak Tree Selves."

I spent a lot of time thinking about this metaphor during my retreat and wondering about it for my own life.

The metaphor asks us to consider what we need to let go of, or what parts of ourselves or the things we hold tightly to do we need to let "die" in order to allow ourselves to break free from the acorn shell and become the mighty oak tree.

As I was contemplating this for myself, I thought to myself, "if I only knew what the goal of becoming the Oak Tree was, I could take steps to get there!"

But, this is exactly the problem.

Becoming the Oak Tree, or "True Self," is not a goal to be achieved.

It is not as though once I become the oak tree, I am done.

That's it!

Become Oak Tree – check! One more thing off the to-do list!

Instead, I began to contemplate some of the things I need to try to let "die," or let go of, in order to allow my acorn self to be planted.

The list we made earlier is similar in many ways to the list I made for myself.

What if Moses and Jesus were offering us examples of what this "dying before we die" looks like?

What if it is a foreshadowing of death and resurrection, but not of actual, bodily death and resurrection.

What if, instead, it is a spiritual death and resurrection?

Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus on the mountain top about his "departure." The Greek word is the same as the word "exodus."

In other words, they are talking with Jesus about his own death.

Peter suggests that they put up tents and just stay together on the mountain. Then Jesus would not have to die.

But Jesus knows that he must die.

Not only must he die a physical, bodily death, but he must show his disciples and his followers how to die to his acorn self before he dies a physical death so that he can become his True, manifested, spiritual self.

This brings us back to the question about what we are grasping on to that we might need to allow to die so that we can be planted and see what will grow from our outer shell – our seed.

Perhaps we need to let go of achievement as the ultimate goal, as I discovered about myself.

Perhaps we need to let go of worry and anxiety.

Some of us may need to let go of past hurts that are keeping our light from shining.

Some of us may need to break down the walls around our hearts that we've built to protect ourselves, but that ultimately keep us from extending our love outward to others.

Perhaps we need to let go of distractions, physical things that clutter our lives, or guilt and shame about something from our past that we cannot change.

The story of Transfiguration is an unexplainable mystery.

But, that mystery ushers us into the season of Lent with an invitation to die so that we can allow ourselves to be raised to new life.

Grasping – holding tight to the dirt and the grime that hides our true colours – prevents us from shining brightly.

I'd like you to try something with me quickly.

Hold your hands tightly in a fist, as though you are grasping onto something for dear life.

How does that feel? For me, it feels tense and uncomfortable.

Now, slowly open your fists.

Does this feel different? For me, it feels like a comfortable release – an opening up – an invitation to receive what God may be offering me.

Lent invites us to release what we are grasping on to and wash ourselves of any grime and dirt so that our light can shine through brilliantly and beautifully.

By pointing us toward the cross (and resurrection) the Transfiguration story prepares us to enter the season of Lent with hope rather than fear or doubt.

So, as we enter the Lenten season, I invite you all to ponder this question of what you may need to “die” to in order to fully live.

It is not an easy question. It is one that you may need to ruminate on throughout the Lenten season and beyond.

But it is a question worth asking, and Lent invites us to do so.

Moses and Jesus show us what happens when God sees *us*.

This notion of letting go – of dying – so that what God sees in us can shine for the world to see – is the Good News of the Transfiguration.

May we wash ourselves of the things that keep us from shining brightly. God can always see beyond the dirt and grime. May we open ourselves up so that we can see what God sees underneath.

May we delight in God as God delights in us. Amen.

Let us pray:

Holy One, today we are grateful for so much. The sunshine, the blue skies, the warmer weather, and even the wind that has helped move the warm air and melt most of the snow and ice. We are grateful for the transformation from cold to warm, from winter to spring-like weather. Even as we know we are not fully through the winter, this transformation gives us hope for the future.

In the same way, the Transfiguration gives us hope for the future. We are grateful that you see through the things we are grasping and holding on to. We are grateful that you see our light underneath whatever dirt and grime the winter of our hearts has covered us with. We pray that you would help us let go of or die to the things we hold tightly to such that we could allow our brilliant light to shine for all to see. God, we delight in you just as you delight in us. Amen.