

SLOW REVEAL

February 11, 2018

Epiphany Last - Transfiguration

[Mark 1:9-11](#)

[Mark 9:2-9](#)

(prayer)

The song of the angels is stilled.
The star in the sky is gone.
The kings and shepherds
have found their way home.
The Work of Christmas is begun.
("I Am the Light of the World" - #87VU)

The light is in the world.

The Work of Christmas is begun.

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You may know that Easter is (what is called) a *movable feast*. Unlike Christmas, which is always on December 25th, Easter happens at different times in different years.

Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. Based on these criteria, Easter always falls [between March 22nd and April 25th](#).

This year, the first day of spring is March 20th.

There will be a full moon on Sat, March 31st.

So, Easter Sunday 2018 is April 1st. I'm not sure what to make of the fact that Easter will also be April Fools day. I guess that we get to live out First Corinthians, chapter four, verse ten: *We are fools for Christ*.

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Within the calendar of the church year, a special season is set aside as a time to prepare ourselves for Easter. Because - in the northern hemisphere - this happens during the *lengthening days of spring*, the season has become known as Lent.

Lent ends on the day before Easter and is always 46 days long (forty days, plus Sundays, so it always starts on a Wednesday - known as Ash Wednesday).

When Easter falls on April Fools Day, and if it is not a leap year, Lent will (coincidentally) begin on another easy-to-remember date: Valentine's Day.

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2018 is *not* a leap year... so, Lent will begin **this** Wednesday, February 14th.

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That makes today the *Last Sunday in the Season of Epiphany*.

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As I have sung at the start of all of these Sundays of Epiphany, *the work of Christmas begins as Jesus (the light) shines in the world*.

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Since the beginning of January, each Sunday, the gospel of Mark has helped us learn about how Jesus' ministry begun:

- Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River;
- Jesus took time alone with his temptations in the Judean wilderness;
- Jesus returned to Galilee where he proclaimed that *the kingdom of God had come near*;

- Jesus went to the fishing village of Capernaum (on the Sea of Galilee), where he began to acquire followers of his own, willing to help him fish for people;
- Jesus taught and healed in the local synagogue, which led to many people flocking to Jesus to be part of what he was doing.
- And, as we heard last week, Jesus decided to set out on a *ministry-road-trip* to share his message in the neighbouring towns too.

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Over the next couple of years, more lessons were shared; healing was known; more disciples joined in Jesus' ministry.

Along the way, Jesus challenged the ridgedness of religious puritanism. He even took his message to gentile (non-jewish) territories. Political and religious elites began to notice how much influence Jesus was having.

In particular, [Herod Antipas](#) (the puppet King of Galilee) was concerned about the rumour that Jesus was a second coming of John the Baptist (whom Herod had had killed)

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[One day](#) while traveling among the villages of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus addressed the various rumours with his disciples:

Who do people say that I am?

John the Baptist, or Elijah,
or one of the other prophets.

*But, who do **you** say that I am?*

Peter: You are The Messiah!

Don't tell anyone about that!

The Son of Man will suffer rejection and be killed before rising again.

No, Jesus, that is not what mean when we say you are the messiah.

Oh Peter, your view is clouded by human thinking; set your mind on divine things.

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Six Days Later, Peter (and two other disciples) were given a chance to see Jesus in a different light.

We heard that story today.

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"Jesus, Peter, James and John went up a high mountain where Jesus was changed [transfigured] before them; his clothes became dazzling white. Then they saw Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. A cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Belov`ed; listen to him!' Suddenly when Peter, James and John looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus."

It was brief... no time to set up extra tents for Moses and Elijah. But in that minūte minute of mystery, the inner circle of Jesus' band of followers were given a hint of God's transcending glory alive in Jesus.

This experience was significant to the early church, in that it is [shared](#) in all three of the [synoptic gospels](#) (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and may be hinted at in the introductory chapter of John: *the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son*. The transfiguration is also referenced in the letter of Second Peter.

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There are four significant parts of the transfiguration vision seen by John, Peter and James:

1. Jesus is seen as **beyond their experience**... clothes whiter than anyone in this world could bleach them;
2. Jesus is seen as part of the **scriptural and historical heritage** of the Hebrew people by sharing the stage with Moses (the giver of the law) and Elijah (the first of the great prophets);
3. Elijah offers a second significance - because he never died a natural death ([blown into heaven by a whirlwind](#)), it was believed - in some first century circles (based on an interpretation of a [verse](#) in Malachi) - that **Elijah's return** would precede the coming of the messiah;
4. And in case this was all too subtle, there was a **heavenly affirmation** of Jesus as God's beloved child with the instruction to listen to him.

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The disciples' eyes and ears confirmed the rumour that Peter had voiced less than a week earlier: Jesus **was** the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.

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When they re-joined the other disciples, the ministry of Jesus carried on much as it had before.

Even through Peter, James and John honoured Jesus' order to keep the details of their *mountain top experience* to themselves, I wonder if any of the others noticed that their perspective on Jesus had changed.

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If you are like me, you may find that final verse (in today's reading) a bit intriguing: *As they were coming down the mountain, [Jesus] ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

This was a repeat of how Jesus responded six days earlier when Peter exclaimed that he believed that Jesus was the messiah... *[Jesus] sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him* ([Mt8:30](#)).

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Why all of this secrecy?

Why is the full truth about Jesus revealed so slowly?

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I have a theory.

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Jesus did not want the focus to be on him.

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Jesus was not interested in being the *centre of a charismatic cult* but the *mentor of mission movement*.

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Jesus encouraged his followers to take this mission into their spheres of influence and make disciples there... not bring him back converts.

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Message over the messenger.

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It is significant - to me - that the transfiguration is in the middle of the story. Preaching, teaching and healing precede it ... and preaching, teaching and healing follow it.

The heavenly voice even tells us that this is not to be the end (or climax) of Jesus' story: *listen to him*.

There was more of Jesus to be revealed.

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The structure of Mark's gospel points to this progressive revelation.

- At the beginning, as part of the baptism story, a heaven voice speaks only to Jesus (notice second person language): *you are my beloved son; I am pleased with you.*
- In the middle, as part of the transfiguration story, the voice speaks to a few disciples (the baptism words are repeated, but this time in the third person): *this is my beloved son; listen to him.*
- At the end, the Risen Jesus gives his closest followers one final lesson: *Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.*

At first, Jesus knows.

Then a few disciples know.

And finally, the world is told.

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We are still in the midst of step three.

The ministry of Jesus is still be revealed.

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Peter, James and John must have treasured their mountain top experience, but they *listened to Jesus* by keeping the focus on what was being said and done, not on who Jesus was.

Message over the messenger.

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Ministry over the minister.

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Last year, I made use of study leave time take two separate courses where I could delve into the [Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry](#)- *learning about* and *building on* the best practices of how churches evolve with the times as their circumstances change.

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There are many factors that lead congregations into transition eras - healthy congregations are as proactive as they can be in addressing these. But sometimes, even the best of them have trouble evolving away from the peripheral aspects of their identity.

Change is hard,
when we are reluctant to change.

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The second course I took concluded with my classmates and I, each, designing a fieldwork project dealing with some aspect of congregational transition.

We were divided into groups of five who have continued to meet monthly by conference.

I am still going over all of answers people wrote down at last week's annual congregational meeting to the question: *What is good about this church?* I have actually been collecting input on that question since last December as part of my project: [In the modern reality of a spiritual not religious context, if people are interested in learning what St. David's church is like, \(if we are being honest\) what should we say and how should we say it.](#)

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Thank you for helping me with my homework. I have my last conference call with my classmates

this coming Tuesday morning.

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St. David's United Church has existed (in some form or another) for 120 years. Unless, some of you look incredible for your age, I assume that none of us have been here for all twelve of those decades.

I have been here for less than $\frac{1}{6}$ of that history but I have witnessed an evolving church.

2018's St. David's is not 2000's St. David's.

And it is certainly not 1898's St. David's.

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I know that this congregation has accepted and chosen changes over the years.

I don't just mean physical changes to the building, or AV systems, or staff changes...

St. David's has also evolved in its understanding of its mission and how to live that out.

Some of these evolutions have happened easily; other changes have been met with understandable resistance.

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A message I hear in today's scripture reading is that Jesus knew that the ministry he and his disciples were sharing was an dynamic one.

Peter might have wanted to freeze the moment with *transfigured Jesus* - to set up camp permanently on the mountain top, but their mission lay down in the valley.

Can you imagine the reaction the others would have had if Peter, James and John had created a shrine on the mountain? People might have ignored the world below in hopes of re-experiencing a time that had passed.

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I believe that Jesus' followers (in the first and twenty-first centuries) are invited to see ourselves in the middle of a story that is still being written.

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We are both heirs of a evolving legacy and future benefactors who must constantly find a new relevance to what it means to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is near.

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Is there still relevance in this congregation's stated **mission** that we are a *nurturing Christian community [that inspires] people to serve others as Christ taught?*

The words of our **motto** - *Welcoming In ~ Reaching Out* - roll easy off the tongue, but... what can that mean in 2018?

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May we not be so distracted by the wonder of today's mountain that we forget we are called into the valley.

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The story of our part in Jesus' mission and ministry is still being written.

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Let us embrace that which is fresh and unfolding.

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Let us pray:

God, you are the source of light in the world. Shine in our hearts so that - through us - the world might see the compassion of Christ. Amen.

#104VU "We Have Come at Christ's Own Bidding"