

“Snow, PhotoShop, Jeremiah Johnson” **Matthew 17:1-9**

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston WV Transfiguration Sunday [March 2,] 2014

^{17:1} And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son,^[a] with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. ⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

Janet is finishing her two year stint in the Academy of Spiritual Formation. It was during *my* journey through the Academy that I was introduced to a new way – the Orthodox way – of seeing the experience told in today’s scripture: Rather than JESUS being transfigured, it was Peter, James, and John who were transfigured, TRANSFORMED, in being able to see Who Jesus was, How He fit into the context of God’s Plan, and what a difference it would make in their lives – indeed what a difference it would make in the whole history of the world.

This scripture always arrives at this time of year in the Lectionary Cycle of scriptures selected. On the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. The Sunday before we begin Lent.

I want to suggest three METAPHORS for how WE can be transfigured:

1 The first metaphor for looking at the Transfiguration experience is that of snow. I’m almost afraid to use this, inasmuch as almost everyone I know is *really* tired of winter this year, and we are forecast to get yet one more taste of a winter storm this afternoon.

One thing that I really like about a winter snow – particularly one that is several inches deep: it covers up all the ugliness with a beautiful, pristine

white covering. The problem with this metaphor is that the beauty does not last for long. Snow removal processes and car traffic soon turn the beauty into an ugly, inconvenient, brown slushy mess.

That's one way we can be transfigured by the Lent experience. We get a little rush, a good feeling, and then it quickly passes like the beauty of untraveled snow.

2

The second metaphor is "Photoshop." This transfiguration in-

volves a computer-like changing of pixels in the appearance of things. It is amazing just what kinds of changes we are able to make in the mere appearance of things, with today's technology.

A "Photoshop" transfiguration can make our Lent into whatever we want to pretend. We *can pretend* to be in a time of prayerfulness. We *can pretend* to do some kind of spiritual exercise by giving up watermelon sandwiches. We can *can pretend* be too cool for such old fashioned kinds of spiritual disciplines as some suggest for Lent.

The "Photoshop" Transfiguration can be whatever we tell ourselves it is. But the bottom line is: **IT'S FAKE**. Regardless of what it looks like. Inside you know the difference. A "Photoshop" Transfiguration will never really transfigure nor transform anyone.

3

The final metaphor I chose is based on an old movie, which is

still popular: Jeremiah Johnson.

The film has been said to have been based in part on the life of the legendary [mountain man Liver-Eating Johnson](#), based on Raymond Thorp and

Robert Bunker's book ***Crow Killer: The Saga of Liver-Eating Johnson*** and Vardis Fisher's book ***Mountain Man***.

The movie is about a young and battle fatigued veteran of the Mexican War, Jeremiah Johnson (played by Robert Redford) who seeks the meaning of life, or something (the movie is not clear) in the rough mountains of the American West. (It is shot in Utah.) He takes up the life of a mountain man, supporting himself in the Rocky Mountains as a trapper.

The movie is about ***his struggles, what he gives up, what he takes up, what he loses, what he gains, and what he eventually becomes. He is never again the same.***

I've heard that Redford claims "Jeremiah Johnson" is the best film he's ever made.

In this metaphor, I'm talking about actually undergoing a change in your life, based on ***your struggles, what you give up, what you take up, what you lose, what you gain, and what you eventually become. It is about never again being the same.***

There's a reason I picked this metaphor. Jeff Mitchell, who puts the sermon title on the sign in front of the church, went nuts when he saw the sermon title this week. "***How can I put all that on that little sign?***"

So I gave him the alternative title: "***Real Mountain Men.***" That is what Moses and Elijah were.

- Elijah did battle with the prophets of Ba'al on a mountain. Elijah found the real presence of God, after all the service he had given God, on a mountain, when he discovered God in the sheer sound of silence.

- Moses was on a mountain when he encountered the burning bush that was not consumed. Moses went up on the mountain again and again, when he received the law from God, and encountered God face to face.
- Mountain top experiences are powerful.

BUT not if they are just the flash of a snowfall, nor the touching up of an experience to make it pretty but phony.

Moses and Elijah came to Jesus to talk with Him about going forward to Jerusalem, where he would meet the Roman Governor and the King of Judah. But it was not going to be a fun vacation with the rich and famous. It would be the *Via Dolorosa* – the way of suffering.

We all are going to face some difficult times in our life. That's the way life is. Nobody ever truthfully said that Life is a bowl of cherries.

Lent is this wonderful season set apart by the Church, for the good of the pilgrims on their journey.

You don't **have to** do it a certain way. You don't **have to** do **anything**.

But if you seek a transformation of your life ... you **will choose** to do something that will **allow you to be changed**.

Snow. PhotoShop. Real Mountain Discipline.

You don't **have to** but let me suggest that **you ought to want to**.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.