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Title: Appearance Changes

Date: March 2 & 3, 2019

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Scripture: [2 Corinthians 3:12-18](#)

Text: [Luke 9:28-36](#)

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I thought about starting with a group exercise. It would take a little time and require some of you to get out of your comfort zone. Here's what I planned. I was going to ask you to take out your drivers license and show it to your neighbor. Would you have done that? I polled a few people and the answer was no. The question behind the

exercise is "Does your drivers' license picture look like you?"

My license renewed in 2016. They made me take off my glasses and told me not to smile. I've got a little smirk so I got away with something. Because I've worn glasses since the third grade, the picture looks odd to me. I think the only license picture I've ever liked was the first one when sixteen! It too was probably terrible; I don't remember. But it was such a rite of passage moment, it was glorious.

I've had the same experience with passports. My current passport is three years old. Again, it's odd looking because of those rules. No hats, no glasses, a neutral expression, and the plain white background. I look washed out, tired, stressed even bloated. Does that sound vain? When you have your picture taken, are you nervous about the results? I don't know what was going on when I had that picture taken, but you could tell there was something.

I had an interesting experience the last time I used it. It was on our Holy Land trip. Let me tell you, I had a time getting out of Tel Aviv. As the group leader, they spent a very long time interrogating me about the suspicious people traveling with me, your fellow church members. It felt like an hour although I think it was not quite half that. Finally, the head of security decided that our group wasn't as nefarious as we looked. He said, "You can go to the window." I did, handing my ticket and passport over to the agent. She looked at the passport and then at me and said, "You look like a

different person." I responded quickly, "Well I am. I just had this incredible mountaintop experience. I'm glad it shows."

You know this truth, don't you? The experiences you have been through will shape your appearance. I know people who have been through an ordeal, some period of sorrow, a time of testing or stress, and you can tell it just by looking at them. Their faces are drawn, their shoulders stooped. They seem to be distracted, worn out and worn down.

Then, I see them sometime later and I am amazed at what has happened to them. They looked like a different person and I'll say so. And they will tell me that something good has happened. The burden is lifted and they are different, better. You can see it. Their appearance changed. The experiences you have been through will shape your appearance.¹

This is the point of the story which by tradition, is looked at on this day. Today is Transfiguration Sunday, the last epiphany of Epiphany. Epiphany begins each year with the Wise Men bringing gifts to baby Jesus. It ends with the Transfiguration. It's a story about changed appearances.

It begins with a statement that sets the context. "Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray." (Luke 9:28) You can't get to the heart of the story without tripping over what happened 8 days earlier. When you look back, you can see that it's a lot. As a human being, Jesus was probably very tired. That's usually when he tried to get away, to go into the hills for a prayer break, to get a mountaintop perspective. As a human being, perhaps he was wondering how effective his ministry had been to date.

From the mountaintop looking over the land of Galilee, if he squinted, perhaps he could make out the figure of the little girl he had raised from the dead a few days before (Luke 8:49f) She was playing in the courtyard in front of her house. Perhaps he could see Herod, pacing back and forth on his roof, shaking his fist at the air saying, "I got rid of John! Now, who is this new nuisance, Jesus?" (Luke 9:7-9). Perhaps Jesus could see a crowd gathering on one side of the mountain asking one another, "Where did that miracle worker go with his loaves and fishes? We are hungry again!" On the other side of the mountain, another crowd gathers and in their midst a young boy is having a seizure, foaming at the mouth and shrieking, while the people ask, "Where is that healer?" (Luke 9:37-43a)

If you know what it is like to be tired, to be misunderstood, to have people seeking you out for what you can do for them, and other people criticizing you and working against you, you have a little something in common with

Jesus. And if you have ever been filled with dread at what lies ahead, you have a lot in common with Jesus.² If we had a picture of Jesus, I believe you could see it in his face.

You could see it also in the face of the disciples. They could look back themselves over the last eight days, and see themselves terrified on the Sea of Galilee and hear again the rebuke Jesus makes about their lack of faith. (Luke 8:22-25) They could see their first experience of being sent out to proclaim the kingdom and heal. Some of it was good; other times, they were shaking the dust off their feet. (Luke 9:1-8) They could see Jesus' disappointment in them when they wanted to send the 5,000 away because of lack of provisions. (Luke 9:10-20) But they could also see Jesus tell them he was going to undergo great suffering, be rejected and killed and the cross they'd bear when following him. (Luke 9:21-27)

If you have ever felt terrified and filled with sinking doubt, if you've ever been unsure about sharing your faith, if you have felt unable to minister and respond to a need because it was just too great, or if you have struggled with news that someone you love is going to suffer and die, you have something in common with the disciples. If we had a picture of Peter, James, and John, I believe you could see on their faces

Jesus invites Peter, James, and John to join him in prayer on top of the mountain. They climb the mountain weighed down all that happened the previous 8 days. The disciples overwhelmed by doubt and Jesus' prediction. Jesus himself, burdened by the demands of his ministry and what looms before him. He kneels to pray while the disciples begin to nod off. "And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white." (Luke 9:29) Jesus was so connected with God that his appearance changed. Luke actually describes it with the same words that are used to describe Moses, who when seeing God on top of Mount Sinai was lit up "in glory." God's glory was revealed in Moses and now it is revealed in Jesus' face as he prayed. Even Jesus' clothes reflect the true nature of his status: they become "dazzling white," symbolic of joy and heavenly glory.³

The bright picture gets even more dazzling. "Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory..." (Luke 9:30-31a) The "glory" is all God, all you can see of God. "Glory" is biblical shorthand for "the presence of God." God is light, like the brightness of the sun. When you look at the sun, all you can see is light. You can't see the sun itself. You can't even look at the light for very long. When you see "glory," you are seeing the presence of God.

I don't know about you, but I can be dead asleep and if a bright light shows up in the room, I wake up. Instantly. Luke says this is what happens. "Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him." (Luke 9:32) But not for long. Again, you can't look at intense light, at glory for long. And that is the way the story goes

Elijah and Moses start to leave. Peter babbles on about building tents so that everyone can hang out together. But just so Peter, James, and John would get the point that this is an epiphany, that on the mountain top they had gazed at the glory of God, "...a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:34-35)

Everybody, every good Jew, everyone knew about the cloud. This is the same image that was used to describe what enveloped Moses on Sinai (Exodus 24:15-18), Elijah on Mt. Carmel (I Kings 18:44-45), and which led the people in the desert (Exodus 13:21). This "cloud" is unmistakably God's very presence. All on this mountaintop find themselves wholly enveloped by the divine shadow. The disciples' reaction is a typical human response when exposed to God's glory. They are terrified. Can you blame them? First the "glory of God" and then, "the cloud of God" with a voice. Wow, what an experience for discouraged disciples. They saw Moses and Elijah, their arms around Jesus, filled with "glory." Then a voice comes from a cloud, "My boy, my son, listen to him!"

What a moment for the disciples. All of the fear and doubts, all of the concern about sharing faith, any hesitations about who Jesus was, and any questions about whether they could follow him to Jerusalem; were gone. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, that's all it was, an epiphany, and they found new direction, purpose, and power for their lives.

And what a moment for Jesus. Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus about his exodus from Jerusalem. They told him to view his journey to Jerusalem as an exodus from death to life, like the Red Sea passage, the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. They offered him encouragement. They were saying, "This is a job that only you can do, and you can do it." And then, God said, "Yes, you can. You're my Son."

The cloud lifts and Jesus is left alone. With a refreshed sense of his own identity, a tired dread filled Jesus is no longer. Assured of God's presence in his own suffering and glory, he gestures to his disciples to fall in behind him and follow him down the mountain.⁴ And even though the story ends, "...they

kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen" (Luke 9:36), I don't think they had to. They'd had a mountain to experience and I'm sure they looked different and people noticed. People noticed that their appearance changed and said so. "What has happened to you? You look like a different person." And they answered, "I'm glad it shows."

It could happen to you. It should happen to you. I don't mean that you can stand on a mountain top and see Jesus transfigured. But I do believe that the "glory of the Lord" should shine in your face. Paul does too. He talks about it in his 2nd letter to the church in Corinth. He reminds those Christians about Moses, who, upon experiencing the "glory" of God, had to wear a veil for the rest of his life because he was so "radiant."

But he says we don't have to wear veils. That's good because we couldn't get a license or a passport if we did. What he says is this: "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Paul is saying that just as the Hebrews looking at Moses' face knew that he had been talking to God, people ought to see in you the evidence that you have been with Jesus. You and I should be changing into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another.⁵ People looking at you ought to be able to see that you have been with Jesus and see some quality in your life that makes you attractive and makes them want to find out what is it about you. "What has happened to you? You look different than your picture."

Do you? I suspect that it's what's behind our reluctance to pull out our license and share it with one another. We don't always look like we want to. But then we should find some encouragement in this story because on the way up the mountain, neither did the disciples and Jesus. And we should find some inspiration. Jesus can do for us what he did personally 2000 thousand years ago. It's why we are here today. To listen to Jesus, to catch the same vision of those disciples. We long to see Christ in all his power and glory, not simply for the spectacle, but for the transformation that might take place within us.

That's why we are here today. We are here today with the prayer that by God's grace, our daily commitment to follow, we will see his glory and our appearance will change.

It can happen. I pray it does. Then people will say to you, "You look like a different person." And you can respond, "Well I am. I've had incredible mountain top experiences with Jesus. I'm glad it shows."

¹ Trotter, Mark. "If you look like your passport photo." Retrieved by subscription at sermons.com.

² Mackenzie, Alice. A Transforming Transfiguration. Patheos, February 3, 2013.

³ Trotter.

⁴ Mackenzie.

⁵ Duff PB. Transformed "from glory to glory": Paul's appeal to the experience of his readers in 2 Corinthians 3:18. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. 2008;127(4):759-780