

“Yes. The Church Should Look Like This”

Psalm 50:1-6

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Mark 9:2-9

We have gathered this Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday to celebrate the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as well as Christ’s manifestation as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Jesus’ radiant appearance on the mountaintop evokes the devouring fire of the glory of the LORD at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24.17). Here, as at Jesus’ baptism, God claims him as a beloved child, in whom God is well pleased. The synoptic gospels offer an enlightening *tableau vivant*, with Christ flanked by Moses, representing the law, and Elijah, representing the prophetic tradition. With this vivid image, the writers of the synoptic gospels demonstrate the relationship of the living Word of God to the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), the written Word of God.¹

Former chief rabbi of Great Britain, Jonathan Sacks, who died in November, said this during a British Broadcasting Company (BBC) interview: “We’ve moved, in Britain and America, from being a ‘We’ society — ‘We’re all in this together’— to an ‘I’ society: ‘I’m free to be whatever I choose.’ The bad news is that this leaves people vulnerable and alone. The good news is that we can turn it around and become a ‘We’ society again.”² Rabbi Sacks taps into the core of my sermon this morning. There is no Jew or Greek, male or female. God created us equal in the image of God. Ethnic, cultural and class distinctions are real, but we are all in this together. Humanity is one blood. An

¹Adapted from the Presbyterian Church (USA) website.

²Cited in *Christian Century*, January 13, 2021, 9.

older married couple offered these words of advice to a young couple during their wedding ceremony:

Your love is priceless and needs to be guarded. Selfishness, pride, lack of forgiveness, and inattentiveness are but some of the many thieves capable of stealing away your love. In a sense your marriage is like a treasure chest forming a protective casing around your love, preventing your love from being stolen. Treasure chests have hard sides. The hardness protects what is on the inside Many people live with the false assumption that love enables a marriage to survive. But that is not the case. Your love will not ensure your marriage will survive; it is your marriage which will ensure your love will survive. This is the very reason God ordained marriage. Marriage keeps love alive, not love keeps marriage alive.³

Commitment to being one, as husband and wife, husband and husband or wife and wife, keeps love alive. It keeps the “We,” we. Love is a feeling and when the “I” takes over in a marriage, well?

Marriage is a God instituted vision for two people to understand and experience what love, reconciliation and “We” are all about. And the Church, the bride of Christ, has a lot to learn about “We.” The “We” of the Church transcends ethnic, cultural and class lines. It is the “I” which creates division. In this regard, John M. Perkins writes,

The problem of reconciliation in our country and in our churches is much too big to be wrestled to the ground by plans that begin in the minds of men. This is a God-sized problem. It is one that only the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can heal. It requires the quality of love that only our Savior can provide. And it requires that we make some uncomfortable confessions.⁴

We are loved unconditionally by God. The power of confession, forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation abounds.

³Found on the preachingtoday.com website. This illustration was provided by Jeff and Janet Johnson, as quoted in Tim Stafford’s Blog, “*Why Marriage?*” (5-7-12).

⁴John M. Perkins, *One Blood* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2018), 16.

Psalm 50:1-6, 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 and Mark 9:2-9 assert that God intersects with our existence.

Psalm 50:1-6 instructs us that God's light beams into our darkness. Psalm 50:1 reads "The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting."

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 states that if God can change the most ruthless of religious leaders like Paul, God can change you, me and every human. 2 Corinthians 4:6 reads, "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Mark 9:2-9 calls Christians to be consistently engaged in the journey of Epiphany, which is a journey of anticipation, encounter and inquiry. This journey helps us recover wonder. It creates moment of pause for serious reflection on who we are and who we are to be as God's beloved. The Transfiguration gives us a profound moment this day to understand the revealing truth about Jesus' identity and its impact for each one of us to make the most of the journey of anticipation, encounter and inquiry. Mark 9:7 reads, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" The Transfiguration is God's vision for the story of redemption that is for everyone. That is why we are to listen to Jesus. Jesus connects the dots from the first word of creation to the consummation of the new heaven and new earth.⁵

⁵In the four paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Leigh Campbell-Taylor, Amy Peeler, Jeffrey A. Conklin-Miller, Shively T. J. Smith and Gennifer Benjamin Brooks in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 314-315, 316-317, 318-319, 320-322 and 322-324.

Enough of the “I” society. The Church must become “We” and live in such a way that we bring others out of isolation into community. Again, John M. Perkins writes,

Biblical reconciliation is the removal of tension between parties and the restoration of loving relationship...I believe that there is a vision-shaped vacuum in the soul of the church that will not be satisfied by man-made strategies or philosophies, but only by His [God’s] vision of the church victoriously fulfilling the divine mandate. I’m asking God to help us to be captured by this awesome vision...one Church that crosses all ethnic, cultural, class lines.⁶

The dichotomy between light and darkness will always be. Yet, God’s vision for unity pursues reconciliation, thus transformation.

On this Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday may we celebrate this truth... There is one race. There is neither yellow, black, brown or white, but only one race. We’re all created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and color is an expression of God’s unique and creative use of a palette of colors, like an artist painting a masterpiece. Believe that reconciliation with God and others unites all of us, regardless of color, gender identity and sexual orientation, into one family. Let the light of Jesus shine through you into the darkness another person is experiencing. May others see Jesus in you, me and all of our siblings worldwide. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 14 February 2021
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⁶John M. Perkins, *One Blood*, 40-41.