

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
Dr. Jonathan Dent
Eyewitness News

March 6, 2011
Transfiguration Sunday

Week by week we come here to receive something special. It's not that something special is not available at any other church, but we have a connection that is unlike any other. We sense this, or I hope we sense this at our Annual meeting, in our small groups, and on Sundays like this at the Lord's table.

Week by week, we need to ask ourselves why we are coming here. This is not to foster doubt, but rather to remember the core of what is important to you in making this our home together. I also know that this is not about any particular individual being here. If I am away, someone else with strong gifts will take my place. If you are away, we will continue on, but some of us will notice you are not here and will miss you. Of course, not everyone will notice. We are large enough for that to be the case, yet small enough for many of us to care.

Our connection to one another is based on our connection to the Lord. This is the definition of "Church." Sociologists will see us as just another social group, selling our particular beliefs as norms for our particular community. Psychologists will see how this fits into our individual needs. Religious Studies scholars will wonder about the stories that we read and what function they provide for us in our human experience. Historians will debate what depictions of history are more or less accurate, to the degree that we can know anything of history at all.

All the various Social Science views can be brought to look at the church. Each one of these, by definition, tries to step back from the believer's individual experience of God to the open observer's picture of what is going on.

The apostle Peter, on the other hand, comes to us as openly and completely honest about his relationship to Jesus. This Peter had many ups and downs in his personality. He was acknowledged as the first among many who would confess Christ as King and the Son of God. He also wanted Jesus to reject the cross and was rebuffed for saying so. He was a leader amongst the

twelve, who stepped out of the boat for his Master, but also began to sink because of doubts. He was a powerful believer, but also the one who denied he even knew Jesus on the day of Jesus' death. He came back to the Lord, but he wanted us all to know that we don't have to go through all the ups and downs that he did. We can give ourselves to this Jesus who provides life and love and peace.

Long before any academics went to work on the quest for the historical Jesus, Peter simply says in his letter, dated to the sixties AD in the reign of Nero, that he did not make up stories about Jesus. Peter knows that people were accusing the church at its earliest stage of making up stuff about Jesus. What Peter responds with is that he simply reported what happened to him.

The transfiguration (a radical transformation or emanation of radiance) is one of the accounts that many see as unbelievable. For a moment, the heavenly reality becomes an earthly one. Jesus receives back just a portion of his divine glory. His clothes glow. His face becomes so bright that you cannot but look away as you often do today as your car faces the sunset. Time and space melt away and the persons representing the Law and the Prophets, Moses and Elijah appear.

And Peter knows that some are saying this is just another hallucination or fabrication, passed along to simple souls. But in his second letter, he shoots back, and says "no" to these reports. In fact, he says, "I was there," just as news reporters give us eyewitness counts on a daily basis, he reports that he saw this. He even wanted to offer hospitality to the two men from the past, and put up some tents or lean-tos, so they can be more comfortable. That's how real it was to Peter.

Well, some would say, that's just what Peter experienced. But James and John were there too and they saw what Peter saw. They heard what Peter heard. God himself was saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!" Peter says, "We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain." (2 Peter 1:18)

So what is the point of relating this? Peter says it is to re-confirm that the Scripture is reliable and that their prophetic message is reliable. We come week by week to listen to the Book, the Bible; not because we know it

already or because we are so wise. We come because we need to hear anew what our lives are based upon, upon the relationship to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King, the Messiah promised and fulfilled.

We have been taught in our culture to be very skeptical about the news reports we hear. I understand this. There is always some spin on the news. Some have even given up on listening to news reports because of this, and because there seems to be less and less censoring of the graphic details of crimes and disasters. News becomes horrific entertainment rather than an appeal to being informed and balanced in our understanding of our life across the planet and across the community.

So there is much reason why in today's culture we come to the Bible with the same skepticism, the same questioning. It is good to question. It is good to explore.

But it is also good to be settled in our hearts and minds on whether or not we are in good relationship to Jesus Christ. The table we come to asks us again, if we are willing to commit ourselves anew to Christ, as He has already committed himself to us, to me, to you.

This is a place to receive. I have been taught that it is not possible to receive a gift when your arms are crossed in front of you. Similarly a hug is not received when you simply tense up and show no mutuality. So it is here.

We do not understand the full mystery of God coming to us in Christ and these elements conveying that mystery, wonder and grace. But we need to understand what it means to come, fully desiring to open ourselves to Jesus, and all He has for us. If we cannot open ourselves in this way, then we should abstain from this communion and research the answers to the questions that keep us from receiving the faith and trust in Jesus we need to have in this act, so that at the next communion, we will have had a time to know for sure that we are giving ourselves completely to God in Jesus Christ during this time.

We don't celebrate this table every week for a reason. It is so that this does not become an empty ritual. So may I suggest that we mark this occasion as a point where we know for sure, we have given ourselves to God in Jesus Christ, choosing to forsake our rebellion against God and saying "yes" to

everything God wants to do in our lives. This is about you and your Lord. Do not let your family member or neighbor worry you about this. You stay in that space on the holy mountain, in the presence of God, seeing what you see, and choosing to believe or not, but being sure you know if you believe or not.

Then may I suggest, you hear the words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." Also hear God saying to you, that you are His son or daughter. Hear God's pleasure in this relationship as you know for sure you are loved.

This is why such a moment at the Table is a tremendous time, special in so many ways. I can't tell you what it means to you. But I can express the transformation God wants to work in you, as you trust Him.

Let us pray.