

'WATT' A Difference!

[Based on Matthew 17:1-9]

Do you ever get the sense that you take God for granted?

Some of us grew up in homes where going to Sunday worship was not an option, it was expected. We grew up always knowing the love of God from an early age. And perhaps we're spoiled a little. We don't remember what it was like to **not** know God.

The story of the Transfiguration reminds us of who God really is – of who Jesus really is. When I was researching material for this all too familiar story, I tried to look at it with new eyes, asking God to give me a fresh approach. And so, this morning, I am going to focus on four words that describe our Lord Jesus, and four corresponding implications for us.

First, our Lord Jesus is **powerful**. At the Transfiguration, God pulls back the veil and allows Peter, James, and John, to see the full, "pre-incarnational" glory of Jesus, who is, by His very nature, God himself. (Philippians 2:6)

The word "transfiguration" in the original Greek is "metamorphoun", from which we get our word 'metamorphosis'. Jesus radically changes from the inside out, back to His full Godly Form. As Paul would later write, "In Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body". (Colossians 2:9)

Jesus shines brighter than a bright August sun! In the other gospel parallels, Mark describes Jesus as brighter than any clothes could be bleached. (Mark 9:3) Luke compares Him to a bolt of lightning. (Luke 9:29) The author, Max Lucado writes that this is "Christ as His truest self, wearing His pre-Bethlehem and post-Resurrection wardrobe" (Max Lucado, "Fearless").

The implication for us is that Jesus is more than just a good teacher. He's more than an influential leader. He's more than a superb role model. He's more than a profound ethicist. Sure, He's a prophet, and yes, He's a priest, and even a king, but He is first and foremost 'God'. He is God in human form. A child once described Him as "God with skin on"!

Jesus told His disciples, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father". (John 14:9) Want to get to know God better? Want to know God's will? Study Jesus in the scriptures!

A friend of mine listens to the Bible on-line during his daily commute. He said, "I like to listen to different books of the Bible, but I try to come back regularly to one of the four gospels. Why? Because I want to know Jesus better".

I think it's amazing that if you know Jesus, you know God. Jesus reveals to us the *heart* of the Father, because He is God in human form.

The Transfiguration shows me that Jesus is powerful, and secondly that He is **primary**. Jesus is number one. He's at the very top of the power hierarchy.

Look at today's story. At first, Peter, James, and John see Him talking with Moses and Elijah. And Peter follows his usual pattern of 'when you don't know what to say, just say any old thing"! Do you know anybody like that?

Well, Peter says something like, "This is nice, Jesus. How about if I build tents for the three of you?" I wonder if he just wants to stretch out this spiritual high as long as he can? But God interrupts him with a booming voice from a descending cloud, echoing what God said earlier at His Son's baptism, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased". And then He adds an extra line... **"Listen to Him!"**

And suddenly – it's just Jesus. No more Moses. No more Elijah. The implication is simple. Jesus wants first place in your life. Moses the lawgiver, and Elijah the prophet, illustrate how Jesus fulfills the law and all the prophecy of scripture.

If you put something or someone on an equal footing with Jesus, well – this wonderful experience we have when we feel the love of God just might be taken away. Peter became distracted and God took it away. Be careful what or who you put on an equal footing with Jesus.

We serve the Lord God Almighty, who knows that serving anything else is simply idol-worship and that will only disappoint and hurt us. God must come first!

This reminds me of God telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his one and only son, the son of promise. It was a test to see if Abraham would keep God first. And Abraham passed that test, and God provided a substitute sacrifice, and rewarded Abraham's faith.

I also think of when Jesus said, "Anyone who comes to me, but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters – yes, even one's own self – can't be my disciple". (Luke 14:26) Jesus exaggerates to make the point that HE must come first in our lives. Jesus is primary!

And so, we see that Jesus is powerful, He is primary, and yet, He is also **Personable**. When the cloud descends and the booming voice from heaven speaks, the three disciples hit the ground face-down in fear. But look at the rest of verse 6 – Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," He said, "Don't be afraid". Jesus doesn't rebuke them, or laugh at them, or question their spiritual growth. He cares for them. He touches them. He reassures them. This reminds me that the God who is sometimes loud and scary, is also caring and compassionate. God is way up there (what theologians call transcendent) but He's also right here with me and with you. He is *immanent*. He is both our Judge and our Saviour. He is our boss as well as our friend.

When I served the Pastoral Charge of Marmora, every day I entered the building, looked to the right, where there was a large and very beautiful stained-glass window, depicting Jesus carrying a lamb, and said aloud, "Morning, Boss." I guess that I just wanted Him to know that I was here, on the job.

When I was growing up, my father had this look that would say more than words, and I immediately knew I'd messed up. That was his sternness, but he also had a tender heart for his only son. That was his loving care, and so it is with God. God is large and in charge. And yet, Jesus reminds us that God also has a gentle, reassuring touch. Some Christians tip one way or the other, to the extreme. Some only see God as judging and punishing, and they never sense His love – only His condemnation.

One of my veteran friends grew up in a home where the father abused the children physically and emotionally, and used religious language to justify it...very sad. That father will be held accountable.

On the other hand, some Christians see God as a pushover, an old grandfather-type who will let you get away with anything – a Santa Claus in the sky – a heavenly slot machine. That's another flawed image of God.

The Bible says God disciplines those He loves. So, the biblical God, is both judging and forgiving. Someone once said the love of God and the wrath of God are the flip sides of the same coin. God disciplines me when I need it, but He also comforts and reassures me when I need that. Jesus reminds us that we have a very personable God.

So...Jesus is powerful, primary and personable, and last, but not least, He is **passionate**. Jesus is passionate about His mission. And what is that mission? The context of our passage today gives it away. Both in chapter 16 and in the rest of chapter 17, you see Jesus teaching His disciples about *why* He must die on a cross. That was His mission! In fact, Luke tells us in his account of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:31), what Jesus and Moses and Elijah are discussing – *Jesus' imminent death!!*

Jesus is passionate about this because it is the very reason He has come to earth as a man. To borrow a Star Wars theme, 'It is His destiny'. Why is Jesus passionate about dying? Seems contradictory that later, He will ask His Heavenly Father if there is any other way the mission can be accomplished. No, He doesn't particularly want to die a tortuous Roman death, but Jesus knows we have a sin problem. He knows we can't solve it on our own. He knows that everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – everyone but Him, that is.

So, the only perfect human to ever live – the Bible calls him the 'second Adam' – will die a sacrificial death, to account for all the sin of humanity, for all who will place their faith in Him. Jesus will atone for *our* sins. That word 'atone' can also be broken up into two words, to read "at-one". That is appropriate, because Jesus' death will conquer sin and death once and for all, so that we can be 'at one' with God again.

So, the Transfiguration reveals that Jesus is **powerful** – He is God! He is **primary** – He must come first. He is **personable** – He cares about us. And He is **passionate** – He desires all to be saved. God wants us, like the disciples present, to "Listen to Him!" Maybe that's why God allowed Peter, James and John to be present at the Transfiguration. Maybe they needed to catch Jesus' passion.

Remember, it wasn't that much earlier when Peter had correctly identified Jesus as the Christ – way to go, Peter! – but then shortly after that, tried to talk Jesus out of going to His death on a cross – not so good, Peter! – which prompted Jesus to rebuke him with, "Satan, get behind me!" Peter, along with James and John, need a heavenly reminder to "*Listen to Him*", and perhaps we do as well.

Sometimes we get distracted by this life and all of its good times and not so good times, but we forget what Jesus was most passionate about – saving people! Even Jesus' own name says it all – a translation from Hebrew is "God saves". Maybe we need to be more grateful for our own salvation, and more concerned about the salvation of those around us.

We owe it to those who have not found God, to hear the good news that Jesus loves them; that God forgives their sin the moment they confess it to Him; that they may have abundant life here, and in the life to come. That's the good news! And we should be as passionate about it as Jesus was. Jesus is powerful, primary, personable, and passionate about us. We have an awesome God!!

LET US PRAY ... FATHER, WE THANK YOU FOR THIS MOMENT WHEN YOU PULLED BACK THE CURTAIN TO REVEAL THE MAJESTY OF YOUR ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, JESUS CHRIST, GOD IN THE FLESH. THANK YOU THAT JESUS POINTS US TO YOUR POWER, YOUR PRE-EMINENCE IN OUR LIVES, YOUR PERSONABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH US, AND YOUR PASSION FOR SAVING US FROM OUR SINS. HELP US TO LOVE YOU MORE, AND TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR AS OURSELVES. IN JESUS' NAME WE PRAY THIS PRAYER. Amen