

“Stop, Look, and Glisten”

February 19, 2012

Rev. David J. Duquette

Some moments change us forever. These watershed events transform us in ways that impact everything about us – the way we think, the way we act, the person we are; we are never the same.

The transfiguration of Jesus was such a moment. It marks a turning point for Jesus and for Peter, James, and John. They go up the mountain with a ministry of preaching, healing, and casting out demons in Galilee. They come down with Jesus’ face set toward Jerusalem and the cross.

So what happened up there, and what does it have to do with us?

The Greek word translated “transfigured” is the basis of the term, “metamorphosis.” One writer described the event this way: A transformation into supraterritorial form takes place at the transfiguration What is promised to believers takes place already for Jesus as the bearer of a unique call. It does so as the anticipation and guarantee of the new reality. It shows that the glory of consummation is the goal of his way of suffering and death. As regards believers, transformation begins already in this life. Seeing the glory of the Lord in the Spirit, they are changed into the image of him whose glory they see (2 Cor. 3:18). This is not mystical deification but a reattainment of the divine likeness. It does not take place by rituals but by the ministry of the Spirit. It is not for an elite few but for all Christians. It is not just a hope for the future (cf. 1 Cor. 15:44ff.) but begins already with the coming of the Spirit as a deposit. It carries with it an imperative: “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*”¹ Set in the new aeon, Christians must reshape their conduct in accordance with it. This takes place as their minds and wills are renewed by the Spirit. They are thus to become what they are².

To become what we are, we stop, look, and glisten.

STOP AND LOOK

Something remarkable happened up on that mountain. Something overwhelming; something that changed everything; for a moment, transcendence reached out and touched Peter, James, and John.

They respond to that moment with tried and true methods guaranteed to evade that touch and avoid being changed. So if you want to maintain the status quo in your life and this world: Here’s how: Open your mouth, and get busy. Peter shows the way by opening his mouth and inserting his foot, “*Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one*

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ro 12:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1995). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (609). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

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*for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”*³ I imagine that while Peter is saying this, he’s gesturing and pointing for James and John to get busy, and James and John are unpacking their supplies and preparing to pitch some tents.

It’s hard to hear anything when we’re talking. It’s hard to see anything when we’re doing something. We confuse speech with meaning; we equate activity with progress. We obscure the work of God in our lives with the best of intentions.

Stop. Look. *“This is my Son, the Beloved.”*

Stop. What is God inviting you to stop doing? We live in a 24/7/365 world. We function at a frantic pace. No wonder we’re stressed; we have too much to do and too little time to do it. And if we think retirement will someday fix that, think again! We simply exchange one set of tents for another.

Stop. Stop what you are doing. Close your mouth and open your eyes. God has something to show you; something that will make a difference and will make you different.

The moment that changes everything; the watershed event that transforms your life may be right around the corner. Transformation is not an option for a Christian; it is a command; it is the sum and substance of the Christian life.

Become what you are by the grace of God – stop, look, and glisten.

GLISTEN

Thomas Merton was one of the great Christian spiritual thinkers of the 20th century. He spent many years at a Trappist monastery in Kentucky, praying, meditating, and writing. “On March 18, 1958, on the corner of Fourth and Walnut, now Fourth and Muhammad Ali in Louisville, Kentucky, Thomas Merton had a vision of oneness with all people. He called this vision an “epiphany.”

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race ... there is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

Paradoxically, Merton experienced this transformation when he was out of his everyday monastic life and was immersed in the hustle and bustle of our shopping district - now Fourth Street Live. Merton said of his experience:

I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see

³ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mk 9:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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each other that way all of the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed...”

(*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, New York: Doubleday, 1996)⁴

Merton’s “epiphany” is an example of the transformation that takes place in us, when we stop resisting and evading, and allow God to touch the transcendence that God has placed in all of us and bring it to new life.

Remember, we are created in the image of God. That image was marred by sin, and God yearns to restore it. God yearns to restore us and all of Creation. That is the redemption won for us on the cross and given to us in our baptism through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We were made to glow in the dark. “*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.*” We were made to glow in the dark, become what you are.

Moments of transfiguration, epiphanies that transform us forever are not limited to the great and the good. They’re not a privilege for the elites like Merton, and St. Francis, and Mother Teresa. She put it so well, “There are no great things, only small things done with great love.”

When we stop all the busyness we use to distract ourselves, look for how Jesus is present in this moment, and listen to what He has to say, we will be changed. We will have an encounter that makes us different so we can make a difference.

Here’s what can happen, when we stop, look, and glisten:

It was January of 1973, and the setting was Elgin State Mental Hospital Elgin Ill. It was the January Interim course field work assignment for my Psychology Major. The assignment was to a residential home for whom were called at the time, “the chronically insane”. This was a rude introduction to clinical psychology for a 20 year old intern from Elmhurst College.

Basically the first week was one of shock. People in various limited states of consciousness ambled around the “day room”. Most were not groomed well. Some had intellectual deficits, and others had emotional problems, like severe Manic Depression and various levels of Schizophrenia. It was a ward for the hopeless. The staff turned me loose to be in the day room and experience the ward. They did not seem to know what to do themselves, let alone supervise a rookie college student.

By the end of the week I decided to change my major from Psychology to something else-- anything else. And then came a decisive prayer--“ Lord, this is a waste of time. These are not even humans in here. This is totally hopeless”. That night an answer came to that prayer in the midst of much tossing and turning. Somewhere the words came, “ They are human, my children.

⁴ <http://www.mertoninstitute.org/retreatsandprograms/TheMertonInstituteEpiphanyProject/tabid/106/Default.aspx>

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What makes you any better than them? Stop treating them like they are not human and treat them with the same respect you would any of the people you so call "normal".

Humbled, I returned totally changed the next day. The residents were greeted with warmth and compassion, by name. They were listened to respectfully, even if not really understood. Their needs were taken up with the staff. They were treated like human beings and not hopeless clinical failures. After 10 days of this, the staff was becoming impressed with the changes in patients. They narrowed it to me, the somewhat quiet and lost intern. So one day they called me to the unit meeting and said, "We have noticed a marked improvement in the residents since you started working with them and we want to know what you are doing to be so successful with them". I swallowed hard and said, "I just treat them like they are human beings". It was too simple of an answer than what they were looking for. The answer lost me credibility with the staff. But it was fine with me. God had changed my heart to see all beings as of great worth and worthy of love and respect.⁵

We were made to glow in the dark. Transformation is not an option; it is a command; it is a gift God will give us.

Become what you are; stop, look, and glisten. Amen.

⁵ <http://www.mertoninstitute.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=rGIrBgNlnV0%3d&tabid=106>