

White Transfiguration

February 22, 2009

(Last Epiphany - Year B)

Mark 9: 2-9

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

I thought and prayed about today's Gospel reading all during this past week.

And, the more and more I thought about today's reading from the Gospel of Mark, the more I could not get a particular song out of my head.

For, in today's reading from the Gospel of Mark, we hear about how Jesus took Peter and James and John up a high mountain by themselves.

And then, Jesus was transfigured in front of their very eyes.

And Jesus' clothes became dazzling white, white such as no one on earth could bleach them.

During this past week, when I have thought about Jesus' clothes becoming dazzling white,

I could not get this one particular song out of my head, a song by Billy Idol from 1982, the song called "White Wedding."

{ sung }

Hey, little sister, what have you done.

Hey, little sister, who's the only one.

It's a nice day for a - white wedding.

It's a nice day to - start again.

It's a nice day for a - white wedding.

It's a nice day to - start again.

Although we do not hear in scripture today about a white wedding, We *do* hear about a white transfiguration, the transfiguration of Jesus.

In the Gospel of Mark, the writer moves quickly through the life of Jesus, never really focusing too much on the details.

However, in Mark's Gospel, when the writer tells us about the

transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top, the writer goes into great detail to tell us about the color of Jesus' clothes.

We are told that Jesus' clothes become dazzling white, much whiter than anyone on earth could ever bleach them.

And Jesus' dazzling white clothes are a sign to us that Jesus has changed and been transfigured right before our very eyes.

For, it's a nice day for a white transfiguration.

It's a nice day to start again.

Now, when people want to be changed,

When people want to be transformed,

They wear white.

In many cultures, the bride, and sometimes the groom, wear all white at their wedding.

The bride wears a white dress on her wedding day, in the hope that she and her new husband will be changed.

The man and the woman become Mr. and Mrs.

And, they are changed and transformed into one flesh in marriage.

For centuries, when we have baptized people into the Christian faith and life, they have worn white.

However, in the very early years of the Christian church, people were baptized naked or with very little clothing on.

After the newly baptized person emerged from the waters of baptism, they put on a new, all-white garment.

On Sundays when we celebrate the Eucharist, I wear this all-white vestment, called an alb.

About a year ago, a child asked why it was that I always wore a white bathrobe to church.

However, this is not a bathrobe.

This is called an alb.

And the alb represents that ancient, dazzling white baptismal garment.

For when we are baptized, we are changed and transformed into a new people, by water and the Holy Spirit.

And this change, this transformation, is marked by white clothing.

Today {at the 10:00 o'clock service}, we are baptizing Vivian Margaret Fisher into Christ's death and resurrection.

Because we want her to be transformed, she is wearing a beautiful white dress.

And on her white dress, her parents have had her name embroidered on the hem, right beside the name of her sister, Elizabeth, who also wore this dress.

In addition, embroidered on her dress is today's date and also the name of this church, St. Alban's Episcopal Church.

Since Vivian is also my niece, this makes this a very special occasion for me and for my family.

Yet, we should not let the baptism of my niece, no matter how cute and adorable she is, cloud us from the facts:

Vivian's baptism is not a dainty and pretty little ceremony.

The fact is - that her baptism is a funeral.

And her white dress is her burial shroud - because she is being buried today with Christ in his death.

Vivian's dazzling white dress is a sign to all of us that she is being buried and transfigured on God's mountain top of change.

For, it's a nice day for a white baptism.

It's a nice day to start again.

Many people, especially those who knew me before I became a priest, will ask me what the most surprising thing about being a priest is.

It is very easy for me to answer this question:

Because the thing that surprises me the most as a priest - is people's amazing resistance to change.

Yet change is what happens on the mountain of transfiguration when Jesus' clothes are changed into dazzling white.

Change is what happens when we are baptized, burying our old life in the grave, in exchange for a new and resurrected life.

Change is what happens when we put on dazzling white clothes and march out of this church to love and serve the Lord.

Change is what the Christian life is all about!

And yet, I am always amazed that people are so afraid and resistant of change, especially in the church.

When, in fact, the church is the mountain top on which all of us are changed and transformed.

I want you to think for a moment about this question:

Has your way of life changed because you have put on the white clothing of the Christian life?

If you do not live your life any differently than a non-Christian does, then, my brothers and sisters - we've got some changin' to do.

For God changes us from people who think only about ourselves - into people who make lunches for shut-ins with Meals on Wheels.

God changes us from people who build up wealth - into people who give away money.

God changes us from people who love those folks that we like - into people who love those folks that we *don't* like.

For each of us who have been baptized into Christ's death have been buried and transfigured on God's mountain top of change.

When our son, Scott, went to his prom last year, most of the guys wore black or dark grey tuxedos.

However, there seemed to be one guy in most every small group who had the guts to wear an all-white tuxedo.

So, have the guts to put on that dazzling white tuxedo or white dress that you were given at your baptism.

Have the guts to be changed.

For, it's a nice day for a white transformation.

It's a nice day to - start again.

AMEN.

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