

This is that day in the church year when we celebrate Christ's transfiguration. Here's something for you to think about. Did you know that the **Greek word translated as "transfiguration"** is the word "**metamor-phothe**," from which we get the word "**metamorphosis**"? I'll bet most of you have experienced metamorphosis. **The dictionary defines metamorphosis as: "a transformation, a complete change of appearance and form."** The best example we have of metamorphosis is the transformation of a lowly caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly.

That process has thrilled people through the ages. Butterflies are beautiful and fascinating. Many butterflies, such as the Monarch, are migratory and capable of long-distance flights. They migrate during the day and use the sun to orient themselves. Because of their striking beauty, butterflies are often seen in works of art. Because of the mysterious process by which they change from ugly caterpillars to beautiful butterflies, **they are often seen as a symbol of new life.** In ancient times a butterfly was seen in Japan as the **IMAGE OF A PERSON'S SOUL**--whether they be living, dying, or already dead.

But the butterfly can have many meanings.

- One Japanese superstition says that if a butterfly enters your guestroom and perches there, the person whom you most love is coming to see you.
- In Chinese culture, two butterflies flying together symbolize love.
- Some people say that when a butterfly lands on you it means good luck. Maybe some of us need to plant butterfly gardens.

There is an old story about two caterpillars who are watching a chrysalis. A chrysalis is to a butterfly what a cocoon is to a moth. Suddenly the chrysalis bursts open to reveal a beautiful butterfly that stretches its wings and flies away. One caterpillar turns to the other and says, **"You'll never get me up in one of those things."**

Well, in the wonderful way God has created the world, that caterpillar will, sooner or later, **"get up in one of those things."**

I think it's interesting that the term indicating the transfiguration of Jesus should be so close to the term describing the metamorphosis of a butterfly. This can help us appreciate how dramatic the change in Jesus' appearance was on that mountain when he was with his closest disciples Peter, James and John. I am not saying that Christ's transfiguration was anything like the metamorphosis of the butterfly. ***[He certainly didn't sprout wings and fly off the mountain like superman.]*** But, something happened that day, something his disciples would never forget.

You know the story. One day Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain. Suddenly and quite dramatically on that mountain Jesus was transfigured right in front of them. Suddenly his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. In Luke's Gospel the word used to describe Jesus' dazzling appearance is the same word that is used to describe lightning. It is an amazing scene. If we can visualize it in our minds, we will experience a sense of awe.

It reminds me of a similar scene in the Old Testament in Exodus 34. Do you remember that day when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments? Moses came down the mountain having been in the presence of God. Quite mysteriously his face shone so much reflecting the glory of God that he had to wear a veil. His face was so radiant the people were afraid to come near him.

That's interesting, don't you think? In the same way when Peter, James and John were on the mountain with Jesus, his clothes became dazzling white. But that's not all. Not only did the disciples see Jesus transfigured, but they also saw two of the Old Testament's figures, Elijah and Moses, with him. Elijah and Moses were talking with Jesus.

This was more than the disciples could process. Peter said to Jesus, ***"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."*** Mark tells us, ***"[Peter] did not know what to say, they were so frightened."***

That is **so** Simon Peter. He never missed an opportunity to open his mouth and plant his foot in it. Maybe if this happened today, Peter would have asked Jesus if he could post pictures of this event on Facebook or Instagram. I can hear him now, **“Master, is it all right if I take a selfie?” Peter had no clue what he was saying. That’s all right. This was an event beyond his understanding.**

And then, as if things had not gotten mysterious enough, a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ***“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”***

I don’t know about you, but if I heard a voice coming out of a cloud, I would be ready to beat a hasty retreat. But the three disciples were probably already in a state of shock. Jesus transfigured Moses and Elijah there in their presence now this voice from a cloud. **It was more than they could possibly take in.**

What a magnificent event this event of the transfiguration was. And only Peter James and John were privy to it. We don’t know why this honor was accorded only to them unless the answer is found in the last verse of Mark’s account: ***“As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”***

It could very well be that, if the other disciples had been there, they wouldn’t have been able to KEEP THE SECRET. The impact of this event was so enormous that surely one of them would have gone home and said to his wife, **“Honey, this was the greatest day of my life. I’m not supposed to tell anybody, but I’ll burst if I don’t. If I tell you, though, you can’t tell anyone.”**

The next day his wife is on the phone with her best friend. ***“Listen, I’m not supposed to tell you this, but . . .”***

This was certainly an astounding occasion. The disciples were confronted with Christ in a new and exalted way. **BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THIS STORY IS THIS: A voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”**

The voice that came from the cloud was for us as much as it was for the Peter, James and John, ***“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”***

Listen to him, first of all, when he says what is critical in life. What is critical for living the Christ-life?

You already know love for God and love for our neighbor. Everything else in life is of secondary importance to those two commands. **We love our neighbor because we love God.**

What does such love look like? Let me tell you about a young lady named Hope Stout. When she was twelve years old Hope was diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer. Hope came to the attention of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. You know about that organization. It works to provide joy to children with terminal illnesses. What a wonderful ministry. The Make-A-Wish Foundation contacted 12-year-old Hope about fulfilling one of her wishes. In a moment of selflessness that is simply awe-inspiring, Hope Stout wished for just one thing: that every kid on the Make-A-Wish list would get their wish granted before she did. To me, this is amazing. She wished that every kid on the Make-A-Wish list would get their wish first.

Inspired by Hope’s example, the organizers at Make-A-Wish kicked into overdrive, raising funds and gathering volunteers to fulfill the wishes of 155 children who were on the list ahead of Hope. They had almost raised enough money to grant every child’s wish when, in January 2004, Hope passed away. But her example still inspires the organization today, and they are working diligently to see that every child gets his or her wish fulfilled as soon as possible.

Why did she do it? This little girl could have asked for almost anything in the world. Why did she give it all up for the sake of others? In Hope’s selfless, extravagant, loving decision, we catch a glimpse of God’s ultimate plan for humanity. **Love God. Love your neighbor.** Listen to Jesus when he says that this is what is critical in life. On the last day, this is how you will be judged not on the basis of how much you’ve accumulated, not on the basis of how many

marathons you've run, not on the basis of how many degrees you've earned. *These things will all be as dirty rags. The only question you and I will be asked is how well we've loved.*

ALSO "LISTEN TO HIM" WHEN HE EXPLAINS WHO OUR NEIGHBOR IS. Not just the people in our family, not just the people in our neighborhood, not just the people who look like us or think like us. **Everyone is our neighbor.**

There was a blacksmith who worked very hard at his trade. It came time for him to die and go to heaven. God sent an angel to get him. But he refused to go. He said, "My **neighbors** are now planting and sowing their crops, and I'm the only blacksmith in town. If something happens to their equipment, it'll need to be fixed, and if I'm not here to do it, they won't be able to get their crop in. So, would you please leave me, so I can serve my **neighbors**?"

The angel had never run into anybody that didn't want to go to heaven, but the angel pleaded the blacksmith's case with God and God said, "OK." Later the angel came again and said, "It's time for you to leave this life and enjoy God's eternal life." Again, the blacksmith said, "One of **our neighbors** is very ill, and if we don't help him harvest his crop, his family will be destitute. Will you please leave me, so I can help him get that crop in?" It became a habit. Every time the angel came, there was always something else for the blacksmith to do. Finally, after many years, he prayed to God, "I think I'm ready. Send you angel." The angel appeared at his bedside. The man said, "If you still want me, I'm ready for you to take me home with God." The angel laughed. "Where do you think you've been all these years.

Jesus' substitution doesn't work like that. Whose place does Jesus the Messiah take? He takes the place of people like the cowardly disciples, the scheming religious leaders, and spineless politicians. He takes the place of people like the blood-stained Barabbas and the cursing criminal. People are the reason that Jesus has to drink the cup of God's wrath. We're the reason that Jesus is dying.

But not just us. It is clear from his teachings that he died for the whole world. **Everyone is our neighbor. Even our enemies are our neighbors.** No one is shut out. Listen to him. **LISTEN TO HIM...as he tells us what is critical in life love for God and neighbor. Listen to him as he defines who our neighbor is.**

AND FINALLY LISTEN TO HIS PROMISE TO US... "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37b). This is to say that Jesus' transfiguration predicts what we shall someday be if we give our lives to him. **We will be transformed from lowly caterpillars to beautiful butterflies.** As someone has said, *"Nature forms us, sin deforms us, the "jails of life" reforms us, education informs us, the world conforms us, but only Jesus transforms us."*

In 1949 John Currier was sentenced to life in prison. Currier, who could not read or write, was later transferred from prison and paroled to work for a wealthy farmer. In 1968, Currier's sentence was ended, and the records in the Department of Corrections show that a letter was written to Currier and to the farmer, **but somehow it never got to either of them.** Currier never even knew that the letter existed. A year went by, then another, and another. Ten years after Currier's sentence had ended the farmer passed away, but Currier kept working, serving out his time. He was only given a little money for personal needs--\$5 a week at first. He slept in a drafty trailer, and he took baths in a horse trough with a garden hose. Life held little joy and no promise for him. But one day a state parole officer finally learned of Currier's plight and told him about the missing letter. **He had lost more than ten years of his life because he failed to get the message that he had been freed.**

HAVE YOU GOTTEN THE MESSAGE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SET FREE? Have you gotten the message that you can be TRANSFORMED? **LISTEN TO HIM...** *"Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."* **He's talking to both you and me!!** LISTEN TO HIM. Whoever you are or whatever you've done, transformation is possible. Listen to him. **Quit living like a caterpillar. Allow him to turn you into a beautiful butterfly.** We are not called to remain in the state that God found us in, but to feed on His WORD and grow. Let him TRANSFORM you—and CHANGE YOU TODAY!! Amen.