

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *Uncovered*

Service Theme: *Glory Uncovered: When It Is Most Hidden, It Is Most on Display*

**Sermon Theme: Transfiguration—A How-To Guide
(February 27, 2022) 2 Corinthians 3:7-18**

So, what's a "Transfiguration"? By definition, a transfiguration is "***a change in form or appearance,***" especially a positive or glorious change. Like Jesus' Transfiguration in today's Gospel, where "***the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.***" But it's not exactly a word we use in everyday conversation, so it probably doesn't communicate much to you. But some of the synonyms of Transfiguration might. The Greek word translated "Transfigured" is **μεταμορφόω**, where the synonym "metamorphosis" comes from.

But the synonym that most grabs our attention is "transformation." Because in one way or another, we're all trying to undergo some kind of transformation in our lives. Whether it's trying to transform our bodies through diet and exercise; trying to transform our appearance with makeup, or hairstyling; trying to transform our knowledge and skills through school, or continuing ed; trying to transform our finances through investing or budgeting; trying to transform ourselves spiritually, so we can live a more godly life. Whether we're trying to be a better parent, a better spouse, a better employee, a better student, a better athlete, a better whatever—we're all trying to undergo transformations, because we think they will make our lives better and more glorious!

And that's one reason why Transfiguration Sunday is so valuable! Because Transfiguration isn't just something that happened to Jesus. Transfiguration is for us too! As Paul writes, "***We...are being***

transformed (same word as Transfigured!) ***into [God's] likeness with ever-increasing glory.***"

An increasingly glorious transformation in our lives? Sounds pretty good, right? But how? In his 2nd letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul gives us, **Transfiguration: A How-To Guide**. Masterfully weaving together our First Reading from Exodus 34 and the Gospel from Luke 9, Paul uncovers for us that we have to take one of two paths in pursuing personal transfiguration in our lives: Either the path of Moses, or the path of Jesus.

Along with leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, when we think of Moses, we think of God's Law. It was through Moses that God gave his Law and The Ten Commandments—his directions for what he wanted people to do and not do. So, in referring to the path of Moses, I mean transformation produced by what you do! Transformation by the Law.

And that path seems pretty glorious. After all, when Moses received the Law from God, he experienced a transfiguration of his own! "***When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.***"

And many of the world's messages today point you down that path of Moses. Motivational speakers, psychiatrists, social media influencers, athletes, and celebrities fill our ears with moving, inspirational speeches that all basically say, "You have the power to transform yourself and your life by the things you do!" You can be better! You can make your life better! You can make something of yourself! You can change the world! Transformation, accomplished by your actions.

And that sounds so glorious, doesn't it? We love stories of self-made people who transformed their lives through hard work, determination, and perseverance; who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and transformed the world. And we'd love to be able to take the credit for transfiguring our lives by what we've done too!

But that's not just the message from secular voices. Many Christian churches also lead people down the path of Moses. Each week, Christian pastors focus on God's law and tell people, "Transform yourself! Be better! Be a better parent! Be a better spouse! Be a better Christian! Do more for God and his glory!" Like a basketball coach getting his team fired up at halftime and go out and win the game, a pastor can use the law to get people jacked to go home and transform themselves by what they do! That's a pretty enticing path, because that's what we want to hear—that we can transform ourselves by keeping God's Law.

But where does the path of Moses really lead? Paul calls the path of Moses, "***the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone...the ministry that brought condemnation.***" The Law doesn't produce transformation. It produces death! Like those medicines doctors prescribed in the early 1900s which contained mercury. They might have seemed like they would work to cure people's diseases...until they killed them!

That's what the law does too. It kills. Because God doesn't say, "Be pretty good," or "Try your hardest," when it comes to keeping the Law. God's standard is, "***Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***" And when we honestly reflect on our lives through the mirror of God's law, it's obvious that what Paul writes to the Romans is true: "***There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***" And because our sinful thoughts, words, and actions have caused us to fall short, following the path of Moses leads to eternal death and condemnation! As Paul writes, "***The wages of sin is death.***"

So, while the idea of transforming our lives by the things that we do might sound really glorious and motivating, it can't deliver. No matter how excited and motivated the coach might get his team of 4th graders to go out and win the game, they're still going to get crushed by the NBA All-Star team.

Likewise, no matter how motivated we might be to transform ourselves by keeping God's Law, our sin still crushes us. Because when you follow the path of Moses, one day, Moses comes knocking. And you'll realize that you haven't transformed yourself, and that you can't transfigure yourself. Because you're not a perfect mom. Because you're not a perfect husband. Because you're not a perfect employee. Because you're not a perfect student. And there's nothing you can do to change that. And that will leave you feeling crushed and helpless.

The truth is, transforming ourselves requires more than simply changing our actions. We need our very hearts to be transfigured! Otherwise, we're just treating the symptoms, and not the disease.

Therefore, we need God's Law to do what it only can do-- kill us! We need God's Law to convict us of our failures, and lead us to despair of our self-righteousness. We need God's law to put to death our sinful pride and foolish hopes of self-transformation, so that we can properly receive the only thing which does transform us.

And that's the other path we can take in pursuit of transfiguration: The path of Jesus! As Paul says, while the path of Moses and the law "***came with glory...transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! Surpassing glory...glory which lasts!***"

If our focus and dependence is on transformation through the law, then it's like there's a veil over our hearts. The law leads us to one of two reactions. Either, we'll acknowledge our failures, and see ourselves as worthless garbage. Or, we'll lie to ourselves with subjective standards of morality, or comparing ourselves to others, and think we're doing pretty well! Both of those veils prevent us from seeing the truth clearly. Except, "***Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.***" When we follow the path of Jesus, then we can see clearly the truth about ourselves, and about our transfiguration.

Instead of transformation coming by our actions, as we like to think, Paul shows us that transformation is something passive—something

we receive and have done to us, rather than something we accomplish by our actions. That doesn't sound very glorious, does it? No one tells great stories about people who are completely dependent and ride the coattails of someone else to transformation! But Paul says that's the only way our transfiguration can happen! ***“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”***

When we contemplate the Lord's glory, we are being transformed into his image. We have to break that down to understand what it means. Here, the Lord's "glory" can't mean the full display of his divine power and glory. That doesn't give comfort or transform people. When the people of Israel saw the reflection of God's glory on Moses' shining face, or when the disciples saw divine glory emanating from Jesus at his Transfiguration, sinners in the presence of a holy God trembled in terror!

This lasting, surpassing glory of God, that brings righteousness, produces freedom, and removes the veil from our hearts...doesn't look very glorious at all! This glory of God, although it was revealed quickly to 3 disciples on a mountaintop, otherwise remained hidden and inglorious under the Son of God's human flesh and blood. Hidden beneath what Jesus was preparing his disciples to face in the near future—his journey to the cross, and his suffering and death.

The Lord's glory which we need to contemplate on to be transformed, is Jesus' sacrificial work on our behalf. His perfect life lived as an inglorious true human being. His ingloriously suffering the punishments of hell in our place. God's glory, hidden beneath torn flesh and spilled blood. And yet, in those moments, God's glory was most on display!

That glory of the Gospel—the good news that Jesus is our Savior—is what transforms our hearts and transfigures our lives. It's what reveals the truth to us. That we're not “doing pretty good,” because Jesus had to pay for our sins. But also, that we're not worthless garbage, because

Jesus loves and values you so much that he willingly suffered and died to save you!

And as we ponder and contemplate on that hidden glory of our Savior's love, our hearts and lives are being progressively transformed and restored to the holy image of God which was lost to sin. So yes, if you want to be a better parent, a better spouse, a better employee, a better student, a better athlete, a better whatever, we need to be continually transformed through the Holy Spirit's power through Word and Sacrament!

Now, Moses will still come knocking, because the perfect realization of our transfiguration won't come until we reach eternity in heaven. So you won't be perfect. But each moment you spend meditating and focusing on God's glorious, gracious, loving sacrifice for you in Jesus, you'll be growing, as Paul says, ***“from glory to glory.”***

Transfiguration isn't based on what you do. Transfiguration is produced by what He has done, and continues to do for you! As we prepare to once again descend the mount of Transfiguration into the valleys of Lent, let's again take advantage of the opportunity to contemplate God's hidden glory, poured out in love for you. To save you. And to transform you. Amen.