

Transfiguration of Our Lord/Last Sunday after Epiphany – Year B

A VISION OF JESUS' FUTURE – AND OURS

Mark 9:2-9

**Transfiguration of Our Lord/Last Sunday after Epiphany
Analysis by Fred Niedner**

2Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 9As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.



Transfiguration of Jesus – Carl Bloch (1834–1890) [From Wikimedia Commons](#)

We still have moments when we're too frightened to talk and too

weary to keep trudging, but every morning, noon, and night we touch the hem of that baptismal garment, and the Spirit whispers again, "You are my child, my beloved. Come. We have places to go."

DIAGNOSIS: Terrified

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): *We've Seen the Future. It Sucks.*

Jesus keeps talking about heading off to die. WTH? He called us to follow him. We have. Indeed, we gave up all we had. Well, maybe not everything, like our jobs and families and sometimes breath itself as did those first disciples, but plenty. We followed because Jesus promised we were near to finding ourselves in a world where God was fully in charge. So far, although we've seen a few remarkable things – even a miracle or two – the world remains the same old for-profit racket run by thieves and the guys with the loudest mouths and biggest guns, and certainly not by one of our people. And now Jesus is giving up. He's deliberately heading straight into the machine and the certainty of an early death.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): *One More Chapter in a Sorry, Old Story*

As a morale boost amid our funk, this movie we didn't know we would find ourselves watching here at the Mountaintop Drive-In means to inspire us, no doubt, featuring as it does the greatest Prophets-Hall-of-Famers, plus Jesus wearing heavenly threads. But we're not buying it. It leaves us paralyzed by all our old fears. Yes, Moses and Elijah were taken straight to heaven to be with God (or so say the legends), but we know the truth of their careers. Elijah confessed to utter failure and God accepted his resignation just before swooping him up. Moses, for all his dozens of mountain-top experiences, never made it to the promised land. His entire generation died with him in the

wilderness. Jesus is headed for the same fate. Despite his fancy, new clothes, he'll die just outside Jerusalem. Herod and Pilate will scarcely remember this "king of the Jews." Why should we?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): *Have We Wasted Our Lives?*

Not only will this Jesus die outside the city. He'll die naked and alone, as will we. We're all trudging toward the same, sorry fate. Like everyone before us, we'll have glimpsed the promised land but died in the wilderness anyway. What's the point of being called God's Beloved Child if that's where heaven leaves you? Is this what happens when God is fully in charge? If so, we should all die scoffing, but more likely we'll all die, one by one, crying out, "My God, why have you abandoned us?" [Here the screen goes blank.]

In Christ, God took our death. We now live Christ's life as his resurrected self on the loose in the here and now.



WE DON'T ALWAYS SEE IT CLEARLY OURSELVES, BUT WE SEE IT IN EACH OTHER. THAT CLOTHES WE WEAR NOW DISPELS DARKNESS AND PUTS AN END TO LONELINESS.

From Canva

PROGNOSIS: We've Seen Enough

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): *The Only Way God Gets God's Way*

Believe it or not – and it remains true even if we don't know it or believe it – we do not die alone. In the very God-forsakenness that we scream out for God to witness and to know, God shows God's self in the death of this naked, abandoned soul on that cross outside Jerusalem. If we want to know how God takes charge of the world, we look there. God doesn't have God's

way by busting heads and hanging enemies out to dry. Instead, in the flesh and blood of this Beloved Son, God undergoes, takes, shares, owns, and transforms (transfigures?) our loneliness, our pain, our sense of abandonment, our dying. The inscription above Jesus' head was meant to taunt, but it gives us the last laugh. This is indeed how God reigns. God seizes, swallows, and owns death. No one dies any deader than does God on that cross.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): *The Son of God's Heavenly Clothes*

The clothes Jesus wears in the mountain-top movie are a sign of God's wholly owning death, for Jesus' clothes are resurrection togs you can only get by dying and then rising. We have received the same garb and have worn it ever since the watery moment when our death with that naked Son of God was guaranteed and the voice said to us also, "You are my child, my beloved." We still have moments when we're too frightened to talk and too weary to keep trudging, but every morning, noon, and night we touch the hem of that baptismal garment, and the Spirit whispers again, "You are my child, my beloved. Come. We have places to go." We trust that voice. We believe. We go.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): *The Son of God's Earthy Clothes*

In Mark's gospel, the young man who met the women at the empty tomb and who also wore one of those garments Jesus modeled in the movie, told them, "From now on, if you want to see Jesus, go to Galilee." The women ran away, quite as frightened as those transfiguration movie-goers. Eventually, however, they all remembered what Jesus said on the way down the mountain afterward. "Keep all this a secret. Then tell it when the Son of Man is raised from the dead." So, now we've done it. We've watched the movie and rehearsed the story again. But here in Galilee (and all its outposts on every continent of Earth), it turns out the Son of God has more new clothes. God raised him

and covered his nakedness in “garments of skin.” But this time, it’s in our skin, our flesh and blood. Jesus clothes himself in us. In Christ, God took our death. We now live Christ’s life as his resurrected self on the loose in the here and now. We don’t always see it clearly ourselves, but we see it in each other. That clothes we wear now dispels darkness and puts an end to loneliness. You might even say we’ve ended up as characters in that mountaintop movie.