

A wise woman once said:

The young people think the old people are fools -- but the old people know the young people are fools.

Never do anything yourself that others can do for you.

In my experience, people who go about looking for trouble usually find it.

The best time to plan a book is when you are doing the dishes.

I married an archaeologist because the older I grow, the more he appreciates me.

There are no secrets that time does not reveal.

All of these are quotes by the one, the only, Agatha Christie. This was and perhaps still is one of the most beloved mystery writers of all time. As I was planning sermons, one of her best-known stories lit up like a beacon when I looked at the Transfiguration Sunday passage from Matthew. It was the book “And then there were none” that came to mind. It weaves the story of visitors to a remote island who one by one start showing up dead. Today instead of visitors on an island, we have visitors to a mountain. Instead of dwindling to none, we dwindle to one, Jesus. And those that visited Jesus on that mountain returned to eternity. They were already dead.

Agatha Christie knew how to draw her readers into a good story. She knew what it took. I decided to ask AI to tell me about things that make up a good mystery story. Here is what AI had to say. First you need a compelling plot and pacing. You also need an intriguing hook. You need memorable characters and a location that will build mood and mystery. Finally, you need a satisfying resolution.

With that in mind, I present our passage today. A passage that with a closer look will give us all the elements of a satisfying mystery. The Transfiguration story is told in the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Today we will look to the transfiguration scene as told by Matthew. We will see how the events of this encounter could rank its own Agatha Christie title which I would call, And Then There Was One.

Play mystery music here.

First, we have our memorable location. Have you ever noticed that quite often God speaks to His people on mountains? There's was Mount Moriah, there was Mount Sinai, and there was Mount Zion. Don't forget the sermon on the mount, plus we have The Mount of Transfiguration, the Mount of Olives, and Mount Calvary. When God chooses a mountain to cascade a message, it's one we best be ready to listen to.

What about our memorable characters. Of course we have Jesus. But we also the 3 disciples that Jesus takes with him up the mountain. Peter, James, and John. By this time, we know Jesus has far more disciples, so why just these 3? Well 3 is an important number. This Transfiguration story has a lot of parallels to the story of Moses going up to receive the 10 commandments. When Moses goes up to Mt. Sinai. Guess how many he takes with him? Yep, he takes Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu.

Would you like to know a few more of the parallels between the Transfiguration story and Moses receiving the law? Whew!

Six is also an important number. Six days that is. With Moses, the cloud rested on the mountain for six days and then on the seventh day God gave Moses the law. For the transfiguration story, it traces back 6 days to another significant event. The one where Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" and to which they answer...

Verse 2 says that Jesus face shone like the sun. After the Mt. Sinai experience, Moses face also shone. So much so that he had to keep it covered. One other parallel is the comfort offered to those with Moses and Jesus who were terrified.

Next, we need an intriguing hook. Look no further than what they were about to see next. They see Jesus glorified. They see Jesus transfigured; blinding radiance pours from Him. In this moment Jesus becomes what He was before He came to earth. His humanity is lifted. He is elevated above earth's horizon and escorted into the eternal. He is home again.

Peter, James, and John are with Jesus on that mountain. That fact alone is not unusual. Not the first mountain they followed Jesus to. They were with Jesus when he delivered his Sermon on

the Mount. And for the next three years, Peter, James and John would follow Jesus just about everywhere He went. What is unusual in today's passage is the fact that Jesus is transfigured right in front of them.

His disciples are witnesses. They saw Jesus' clothes and body begin to shine in divine glory. Then they saw. Noooo. Can it be? It's Moses and Elijah. And they're talking to Jesus as if they're old friends. We don't know exactly what they said to Jesus. But just their appearances make a statement. Moses represented the law and Elijah the prophets. Without a single word spoken they are showing that the law and prophets are fulfilled in Jesus.

It is Moses who would go up Mt. Sinai to receive the ten Commandments from God. To receive the laws that would set the moral fabric for Israelites and beyond. After this encounter we read that Moses' face was so bright, he had to mask his face. Moses represents the law and God's way of giving forgiveness. Elijah was a prophet during the evil days of King Ahab. Elijah has his own mountain top experience on Mount Carmel. It is there that he bests the false prophets of Ahab and Jezebel when God's power lights up the altar with fire. Along with other prophets, Elijah gave God's warnings and blessings when necessary.

Nothing could have prepared the disciples for what they experienced up on the mountain that day. First, Jesus starts glowing and that wasn't just a reflected light that would come from the setting sun. This light was brilliant; a shield-your-face kind of brightness. And this light was not just confined to Jesus' face. His entire body glowed. This was transfiguration. But transformation is predicted. There is a difference. When would Jesus be transformed?

On the Mountain the disciples see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. How did they know it was them? We don't get that from any of the accounts, but somehow, they knew. These men, two of the greatest leaders of Israel, were talking with Jesus! Here comes another hook because suddenly a cloud appears. From the cloud a voice speaks. The disciples are terrified. These men had attended Hebrew school. They knew about voices coming from clouds, because their ancestors heard just that on Mt. Sinai.

The voice is clear: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him.” This was a transfiguration moment. But it wasn’t time for transformation just yet, that would come later. This is why Jesus says. Don’t tell what you have seen until the son of Man has been raised from the dead. You see, that’s when the transformation happens. The dead human body of Jesus will lay in a shrouded tomb for 3 days and then his body will be transformed. This is the transformation that will change history. For now, the transfiguration story is for them alone.

We never hear if Peter, James and John ever return to that sacred mountain. But think about it. They didn’t really need to. Jesus replaced his physical presence with His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is the presence of the living resurrected Jesus who now dwells within each of us. He dwells in you, and you, and you! The Transfiguration is about change from the inside out. As believers in Jesus, we believe we are changed. What once was is now no longer. In Romans, Paul explains the difference between what we were, “the old Adam” and how we’ve transformed into the “new Adam” Christ in us. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit transfigures us so that our lives, our behavior, our character traits, reflect the values of Jesus. Want to know more about those values? Might I suggest Matthew 5 and the Beatitudes.

Ready for the satisfying resolution? The Transfiguration event reminds us that Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of God who kept the law perfectly. Jesus came to take our place because we as humans could not keep the law on our own. Jesus came to redeem humanity from the price of the broken law. As the prophet Isaiah will predict, By His wounds we are healed.

We are restored to intimacy, friendship, harmony and peace with God and humanity. In Jesus we become new creatures. Our face becomes the face of Christ in the world. Our Actions become “Salt” and “light” in the world. What a surprise ending for us. We don’t deserve this!

What does all of this mean for us today? Here are a few thoughts. Today we are no different from those who lived in Jesus’ time. Are we? Are we? One of our greatest needs remains the need to be accepted.

When we experience acceptance then we experience the reassurance of love. We see this acted out between parents and children all the time. A parent reaches down to hold the hand of a child... there is a hug. There's a smile. There's an I accept you. And then there's an I love you. Smiles, acceptance and an I love you. Turn to a neighbor. Give em a big toothy smile. Tell them they are accepted and they are loved.

When we feel acceptance through friendship, nurture and care, we begin to understand what it means to be in "harmony" with one another and to be at "peace." Jesus brings harmony and peace restoring our friendship with Go. Our soul needs this. This is our transfiguration.

Perfect love, harmony and peace are things people in our world hope to possess. They are in a constant search for acceptance and affirmation. They long to find peace, harmony, and intimacy. To simply know that someone accepts them.

Good news church family! Jesus is in the transformation business. Because Jesus allowed himself to experience the cross, death, and the transformative experience of resurrection, we also have hope that we will experience that same transformation.

This week begins our time set aside for closer intimacy with our Savior. It is that period of 40 days we call lent. We begin that journey this Wednesday. We travel the road for 40 days.

Then on Easter Sunday we once again get stand before that empty tomb. To remember once again that Jesus defeated death, so that all who believe can be accepted, loved and saved. Mmm. Isn't that's one heck of a satisfying resolution?