

## **Sermon 022617**

### **Shine Jesus Shine**

When I became associate dean at the Trinity School for Ministry, I was exposed to what we call “contemporary church music,” also sometimes called “praise music.” I wasn’t just exposed to praise music; I got a huge dose of it. Each school day at Trinity there is a community chapel service with different community groups leading the worship. I would classify the worship at Trinity as “charismatic lite,” so there was praise music at almost every chapel service with uplifted hands and a little rocking and rolling. There was one group though, that really got it on. The seminary offers a Masters Degree in Youth Ministry, and the students in that group are part of a youth ministry organization called Rock the World. Rock the World had their own praise band with the priest who was in charge playing the bass. The band was really good, it was heavy metal, and their favorite song was one that you have probably heard if you have ever had any association with youth ministry or praise music. The name of the song is *Shine Jesus Shine* and it goes like this:

*Lord the light of Your love is shining*

*In the midst of the darkness, shining*

*Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us*

*Set us free by the truth You now bring us*

*Shine on me*

*Shine on me*

*Shine, Jesus, shine*

*Fill this land with the Father's glory*

*Blaze, Spirit, blaze, Set our hearts on fire*

*Flow, river, flow*

*Flood the nations with grace and mercy*

*Send forth Your Word, Lord And let there be light.*

Last year at the Kairos Christmas party at the Michael Unit, I was again exposed to contemporary praise music, this time the praise band was from a local church that shall remain unnamed, and the music was really bad. It was very loud and the leader literally screamed into the microphone. I was sitting beside Fr. Jesse, an 85 year old priest from Fort Worth who turned to me and said, "You know the problem with this music is that there is no story." Along with being self-centered rather than God centered, lack of a story is a major problem with contemporary praise music, but not with *Shine Jesus Shine*. I love that song even though sometimes during chapel, Rock the World would get so worked up that they would sing what seemed like 2 or 3 hundred choruses. What Christian wouldn't like the story in *Shine Jesus Shine? Lord the light of Your love is shining; In the midst of the darkness, shining...* This little song is the story of Epiphany and the Transfiguration.

The Feast of the Transfiguration is August 6 in our church calendar. Why then, you might ask, are we reading Matthew's account of the Transfiguration today? The Transfiguration was a late-comer to the church calendar, and didn't find its place as easily as did the resurrection, the baptism, or the ascension. Remember, this is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, and Epiphany is a Greek word meaning manifestation, or showing forth, or revelation and is also known as the Feast of lights. The Transfiguration is an Epiphany

story because it is a spectacular manifestation of Jesus Christ as he appears to the disciples in a blaze of glory. As Jesus came down from the mountain after this miraculous event, he began his trek to the Cross, and the shadow of the Cross falls on every teaching and event in his journey.

Just try to imagine yourself here on Mt. Tabor. It might be easier for me to imagine it because I have been there and some of you were with me. Like many of the religious sites in Israel, the Mount of the Transfiguration is now highly commercialized. Mt. Tabor is a strange geological formation rising like a solitary dome out of the flat plain of Jezreel. Early pilgrims climbing 4300 steps that had been carved into the mountain, but today, you take a taxi to get to the peak. Believe me, it is a wild ride, but well worth it. As with most of the religious sites in Israel, the Franciscans are in charge and their Church of the Transfiguration is beautiful as is the view from the mountain. There are chapels dedicated to Moses and Elijah in the Church, and during the St. Philip's trip to the Holy Land, our tour guide was able to get us a reservation to celebrate the Holy Eucharist in the Chapel of Moses.

Our reading begins: *Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.* Six days later than what? This is six days following the events at Caesarea Phillipi where Peter made his famous confession where he told Jesus: *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.* Jesus commended Peter and told him that *on this rock I will build my church.* Then came the troubling news: *... Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the*

*third day be raised to life.* After his display of amazing insight, Peter promptly displays his ability to open mouth, insert foot as he says: *Never Lord!* Jesus then tells Peter that he is a stumbling block in his journey to the Cross, but goes on to tell the disciples: *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it... I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

So here we are, six days later with Peter, James, and John, the inner circle on the mountain. Mt. Tabor is 1929 feet above sea level, and scholars tell us it may not be the actual location of the Transfiguration. They tell us that Mt. Herman is much higher and closer to Caesarea Philippi. We don't want to put the taxi drivers out of business so for now, let's assume that the mountain was Mt. Tabor. Now picture yourself on this mountain with your friends and the young rabbi who has become your leader and friend. *And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.* This ordinary man is glowing, shining out in dazzling light. This is not something that you see every day. This is the vision of Jesus in heaven that John saw in the Book of Revelation: *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.* This could also be a preview of our resurrection bodies. *Just then there appeared before them*

*Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.* The appearance of Moses and Elijah seems to be related to the Law and Prophets and bears testimony to the unity between the Old and New Testament with Moses representing the Law and Elijah the prophets. Peter could always be counted on to blurt out the first thing that came to his mind. *Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."* Peter probably intended to honor Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, but he gave the three equal standing. It was not enough to give Jesus authority equal to that of Moses and Elijah. He is the Son of God, and His authority is much greater than theirs. The proclamation from God quickly corrected his statement.

*While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* This is reminiscent of Exodus 34:5: *Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD.* This theophany, or physical manifestation of God suggests a connection between Jesus and Moses. Jesus is identified with the prophet to come by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—* and yet he is a far greater prophet because he is the Son of God in whom God himself delights. *When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.*<sup>7</sup> *But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."*<sup>8</sup> *When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.* Again, imagining that you are on the mountain, you can relate to the fear that the disciples felt as they saw their friend glowing and heard the voice of God and felt his presence. Jesus saw this immediately and his touch and invitation to get up show love and compassion without condemnation. The disciples had seriously misunderstood who Jesus is as shown by Peter's

suggestion which resulted in God's response. They had been chastised by God himself but the time for compassion and healing had come.

*As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.* Because at this point the disciples did not have a full understanding of Jesus' person and mission, he commanded them not to tell about this amazing incident. Jesus needed to complete his mission. This was a "mountaintop experience" a phrase that we have adopted in Christian circles to describe an intense spiritual experience – an encounter with God. I have heard many Christians speak of having "mountaintop experiences," but I'm not absolutely certain about what one looks or feels like. I have experienced times when I feel close to God, but nothing like the experience that Peter, James and John had in today's Gospel reading. All of us should be seeking "mountaintop experiences." The coming 40 days of Lent is a good time to spend time on your spiritual mountaintop.

Just as Jesus and the disciples came down from the mountain after the Transfiguration, so will all of us come down from our "mountaintop experiences." Jesus continued on his path to the Cross and as he came down into the valley, encountered a boy with a demon. As we approach the season of Lent, we are preparing to make the walk with Jesus to the Cross. As we come down from our mountaintop, we come back into an imperfect world. When we have moments of feeling close to God and of being at peace, like Peter, we want to prolong these moments. The reality is that we can't stay in these moments.

The Transfiguration was a gift to the disciples providing for them confirmation that Jesus was the divine Son of God and that he is King above all kings. It provided encouragement

for them to continue on the road to the Cross. It is the same for us. The Transfiguration is provided to give us strength for our daily ministry and to walk in the way of the Cross.

Susanna Wesley had a prayer that went like this: "Help me Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in thy presence." The glory of the Transfiguration is not just another miracle for us to observe; it was given to us to bring the light of Christ to the world but also to even the most common things in our lives – our family, our friends, our neighbors.

*Shine, Jesus, shine*

*Fill this land with the Father's glory*

*Blaze, Spirit, blaze, Set our hearts on fire*

*Flow, river, flow*

*Flood the nations with grace and mercy*

*Send forth Your Word, Lord And let there be light. Amen.*