

Today is the last Sunday after the Epiphany, the last Sunday before Lent.

Every year on this Sunday we hear the story  
of Jesus' Transfiguration on the Holy Mountain.

All through this season of Epiphany we've been talking about signs.

Jesus' baptism, his exorcisms, healings, his wisdom sayings,  
and today the final revelation of exactly who this Jesus is:

"This is my Son, my Beloved. Listen to him!"

God gives the disciples are given a sign on that mountain,

a sign that shows them who Jesus really is  
so that when they see him lifted high on a cross,  
they will know exactly who is up there dying.

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Humans need signs.

Christians need signs of who Jesus is so we can understand  
what it means to be the Body of Christ,  
so we can know what it means when he offers  
us his body and his blood.

St. Paul says we need to know who he is so that  
we can be transformed into his image.

He says that seeing Christ's glory changes us,  
from one degree of glory to another, by the power of the Spirit.

All humans, Christian or not, need signs.

It's how we change, how we grow into our potential  
or regress into the worst version of ourselves.

Those signs are out there, too.

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I've been paying attention to signs this week,  
signs that draw us to our better selves.

My favorite sign this week is one a lot of people have been talking about.  
It's a little corny and obvious, but I don't care.

It's when Luke Combs and Tracy Chapman sang together  
at the Grammys last Sunday.

Tracy Chapman is this reclusive black folk singer who in 1988  
wrote a beautiful song called "Fast Car"  
about a woman trying to get her life started  
in the face of poverty and family disfunction.

That album came out when I was a sophomore in college.  
I must have listened to that album a hundred times at least.  
I memorized every song.

You should have seen frat-boy Greg singing all those songs about  
racism and injustice without any sense of irony,  
because that's what you do when you're a sophomore in college.

Anyway, last year a country singer named Luke Combs  
recorded "Fast Car" and it was a surprise hit.  
It's been played over 65 million times on Spotify.  
He's talked about it being his favorite song growing up.

They sang it together at the Grammys,  
and when they did something magical happened.

These two people who look like they're on opposite sides  
of every cultural divide in our country...  
and whose fans look like they're on opposite sides  
of every cultural divide in our country...  
were united by art, united by music,  
united in their shared humanity.

If you watched their faces you could see that Tracy Chapman  
was deeply moved by the love she was being shown in that moment,  
and Luke Combs, this burly country singer  
who wasn't even born when the song first came out,  
was absolutely in awe of getting to sing beside one of his heroes.

I tried to be cynical about it. I really did.  
But when I gave in and watched it  
their faces turned my heart from stone to flesh.  
Their faces were transfigured!

Now, did it mean everything got fixed in our country? Of course not.  
But it was a sign, a sign that we could be better than we are.  
It was a sign of our potential, and when I looked at it,  
it changed me.

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Signs show us what is possible in our lives.

I often think about a woman who had spent her whole life  
in the Roman Catholic Church,  
who came here one Sunday and began to weep  
when she saw a woman stand behind that altar  
and preside over the Eucharist.

I've talked before about how important it was 20 years ago  
to meet a priest who shared some of my background  
in order for me to imagine that I could be a priest, too.

If you're coming to the seasoned saints lunch today  
you'll hear me talking about the challenges that men and boys  
are facing right now, and one of the biggest obstacles they face  
is the loss of role models -  
the loss of signs of what their lives can become.

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When Elijah was old he knew his time on earth was coming to an end.  
Elijah was a great prophet and had served God for a long time.

He asked his protege Elisha what gift he could give him,  
and Elisha said, "Give me a double portion of your spirit."

Elijah told Elisha that if he stayed with him all the way to the end,  
Elisha would receive that double portion.

Elisha went with him, from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan River,  
and at the Jordan he saw Elijah taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

"Father! Father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"

When it was over Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle  
and received that double portion.

Elisha knew he was now the prophet to lead God's people.

But that only happened because Elisha saw the sign  
that showed him who Elijah really was,  
the sign that showed him who he could be, too.

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People reach their potential because they see a sign of who they can be.

Children overcome all sorts of hardships and obstacles

when they see a sign - a sign that they have gifts to offer,  
that the way of life and health is worth walking.

I just saw an interview with DeJounte Murray from the Atlanta Hawks.

He talked about being in and out of trouble with the law  
until the people in his life showed him 2 signs,  
one about who he COULD be,  
and one about what he WOULD be if he stayed  
on the path he was walking.

People join churches because somebody shows them a sign

that they can belong in THIS place,  
that they can be safe here, loved here, needed here.

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Today you get a glimpse of who Jesus truly is.

Today God calls on you to listen to his Son, his beloved -

to see his ministry of healing,  
to hear his teachings about the Kingdom of God,  
to believe in his promise of salvation.

Today God is showing you the glory that can be yours,

bit by bit, from one degree to another, if you look at Jesus' glory.

The Transfiguration is more than just a curious little story

to be taught in Sunday School.

The Transfiguration is a sign of who Jesus really is.

He is your Lord, and your Savior - Listen to him!