

Don't Smile For The Camera  
Luke 9:28-36  
NUCC Traditional  
3 March 2019 (Transfiguration)

\*PRAY

I love to travel, so it was strange that I let my passport expire. But I had an exciting trip planned a few years ago, so it was time to ensure that my passport was renewed. I did all the paperwork that is required and then it was time to provide the picture. So, I went to the CVS here at Pine Ridge and 41. The person was getting ready to take my picture and I did what I always do when someone is about to take my picture – I smiled. The man who was taking the picture stopped and said: “Sir, I need you to stop smiling.” I thought it was a joke, so I laughed and smiled even more broadly. Then the poor clerk repeated himself: “No, sir, I am serious. You aren’t allowed to smile in a passport photo. It’s the law.” Do you know how difficult it is to *not* smile for the camera?

I don’t know if you’re familiar with the adage: “If you look like your passport picture, you need the trip.” But if that’s true, I should always be on a trip, because my passport photo makes me look physically uncomfortable. I am trying awkwardly not to smile and not to look angry all at the same time.

The experiences you have been through will shape your appearance. I know people who have been through some ordeal, some period of sorrow, a time of testing, a period of stress, and you can tell just by looking at them. Their faces are drawn, their shoulders stooped. They seem to be distracted.

When I see them sometime later, I am amazed at what has happened to them. I say to them, “You look like a different person.” They say, “Well, I am. A wonderful thing

has happened to me. I am a different person now." The experiences you have been through will shape your appearance.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a critic of Christianity, said, "Christians ought to look more redeemed." Our experiences are reflected in our appearance.

Our scripture reading this morning is known as the Transfiguration and thus Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the season of Lent. Today is the end of the season of Epiphany, which began the first Sunday in January.

The season began with the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan. In that text it says, "The heavens were opened, and a voice said, 'This is my Son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.'" The season ends on this Sunday, where once again the heavens open and a voice from heaven says, "This is my Son." Then it adds this line, "Listen to him!"

And when the disciples come down from the mountain, Jesus tells them not to tell anyone what they've experienced. But people can tell by simply looking at them. They have had a transforming experience, you know, the kind that can change your appearance, and cause people to ask, "What has happened to you? You are different."

I believe this is one of the key differences between us and the first century Church. I fear that we have been trained not to see the transfigurations and transformations right before our eyes. We don't expect to see these things. We've been trained that seeing is a physiological phenomenon only, a function of light impacting sensory organs. We are also suspicious of anybody who claims to have seen something

that is not easily visible to everyone else. We say, "That person's been seeing things."  
By which we mean, they are seeing things that aren't real.

But the Bible has a different understanding of sight. In the Bible there is not only "seeing," there is also "vision." Vision is seeing what God gives us the gift to see. And it can be so much deeper and richer and, if we're honest, scarier. It can mean things like five Habitat homes in Immokalee or a dental suite in the Neighborhood Health Clinic, or a refrigeration unit and power generator at Grace Place. Vision means a church where all people are not only welcomed, but celebrated.

And I must say that we start to look different. We start to smile more and worry less. We start to ask questions like: "What can we give away?" not "How much do we have to keep?" We ensure that women are included in every level of leadership, and that the rainbow of God's diversity is our diversity too.

So, come to this Table and be nourished for the journey. May people see you this week and suddenly say: "What happened to you?" And you can smile, and with confidence say: "I've been transfigured."