

Rev. Dr. Thomas Nelson Green  
Interim Pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Manhattan, 1968-70  
2/10/2013, Transfiguration Sunday  
The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Immanuel Lutheran Church  
St. Luke 9:28-31, 33

## IN NOMINE IESU CHRISTI

NOW ABOUT EIGHT DAYS AFTER THESE SAYINGS HE TOOK WITH HIM PETER AND JOHN AND JAMES AND WENT UP ON THE MOUNTAIN TO PRAY. AND AS HE WAS PRAYING, THE APPEARANCE OF HIS COUNTENANCE WAS ALTERED, AND HIS RAIMENT BECAME DAZZLING WHITE, AND BEHOLD, TWO MEN WERE TALKING WITH HIM, MOSES AND ELIJAH, WHO APPEARED IN GLORY AND SPOKE OF HIS DEPARTURE, WHICH HE WAS TO ACCOMPLISH AT JERUSALEM .... AND AS THE MEN WERE PARTING FROM HIM, PETER SAID TO JESUS, "MASTER, IT IS WELL THAT WE ARE HERE." . . . AS HE SAID THIS, A CLOUD CAME AND OVERSHADOWED THEM, AND THEY WERE AFRAID AS THEY ENERED THE CLOUD. AND A VOICE CAME OUT OF THE CLOUD, SAYING, "THIS IS MY SON, MY CHOSEN; LISTEN TO HIM!"

On this day of grateful remembering we would surely all agree with St. Peter when he exclaimed, "Master, it is well that we are here." Indeed, for us who love Immanuel Church, there is nowhere else on earth that we would rather be. Yet, a serious question arises when a congregation joins in an anniversary celebration. Exactly what is it that we are celebrating?

An answer is almost automatic! We are celebrating the history of the congregation, especially as its members have lived and worshiped in this holy house. We almost automatically become nostalgic and a bit poetic as we think of the building in which the congregation has been housed so long. For those with eyes to see, its steeple continues to bid them raise their thoughts from things of the earth and soar to heavenly things. For those with ears to hear, the three imperial bells proclaim that faith, hope and love abide with us still. For almost a century and a half God's grace and love have rested steadily upon this place.

On the other hand we may think of historic events in the past 150 years that have touched the lives of Immanuel's members. They have been years when thousands of German emigrants arrived in New York and enlarged the congregation. They have been years in which there have been almost ceaseless

wars and rumors of wars: the Civil War, World Wars I & II, the Cold War, the Korean Conflict, Desert Storm, Iraq, and Afghanistan. They have been years in which many experienced the difficult change from worshiping in German to worshiping in English. The congregation has weathered the roaring twenties and the great depression, prosperity and our present recession. The congregation has witnessed social change and the movement toward racial equality. The parish has also seen a shift in moral standards. When it was founded church membership and churchgoing were the general order of the day. Alas, how much that has changed! Yet, through these vicissitudes Immanuel has been true to its founders' goals. The unfortunate result of this historic approach to celebrating an anniversary is that it often seems that the best, the golden years have past away, that "The glory has departed."

When a congregation celebrates so important an anniversary as the one we celebrate today, it is absolutely essential that we rejoice not in what is subject to change, but rather in what does not change. We rejoice in God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. We rejoice in His immutable grace and mercy and glory that bless our days. Because of God's changelessness it is a special blessing that we are beginning the anniversary festivities on the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord. You see, the transfiguration that took place on the holy mountain is far more than a onetime historic event. It is that, but for us it is far more. Immanuel Church is a house of transfiguration. It is a holy place in which God who is with us is at work transforming and transfiguring the members of the congregation who gather here on each Lord's Day and Holy Day.

Look again at the text. Our Divine Redeemer took Peter and John and James up on a mountain. The Lord apparently separated Himself from the disciples and was in earnest conversation with His heavenly Father. The transfiguration was really a prayer experience. It was while He was in close communion with His Father that the appearance of His face was altered, and His clothing became dazzling white. All was light and glory on the mountain top. Moses and Elijah had come from glory and glory shone around them. They spoke of the end of the Lord's work and His departure. Then there was the cloud, the same cloud of God's presence that had earlier played so important a role in Israel's history. The cloud had guided them through the long trek in the wilderness. The cloud had appeared again at Mt. Sinai. The cloud had been present on the solemn day when Solomon consecrated the temple to be the dwelling place on earth of Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. Now from that same cloud came the voice of the heavenly Father. "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him"

Some view the Transfiguration as a brief moment of splendor and glory after

which the Lord Jesus and the disciples descended into the valley of normality. But this is not the case. In His own mysterious way our Divine Lord moved from glory unto glory! Remember those mystical words of His high priestly prayer: He would be glorified and He would glorify the Father with His suffering and death. He would glorify the Father and be glorified by His triumphant resurrection. He would glorify the Father and be glorified by His ascension and enthronement at the right hand of the Father. Thus the transfiguration, the death and the resurrection and the ascension of Christ are all of a piece. They join together as a revelation of Christ's divine glory, a glory that Christ would share with us.

This truth is the heart of our anniversary celebration. Throughout the history of Immanuel Church, God has been present. Moreover, through all of those years God has been at the work of transfiguring and transforming the members of the congregation into holy children of God. This holy house is indeed a house of transfiguration. The reason for assembling here never changes, and it can never change. Immanuel congregation gathers together so that through Word and Sacrament the members might be more and more transfigured into children of God. We rejoice today that this sanctifying change has been taking place here for 150 years.

Embrace God's mysterious way of working! In every song and hymn and anthem that is sung God is at work in you. Because they are really expositions of the Sacred Scripture, every sermon that is preached in this place is a word of summons and encouragement to be open to the workings of the Holy Spirit that you might be changed. Every Baptism that is celebrated is a declaration that God has entered the body and soul and spirit of a child to begin the work of transfiguration. Every celebration of the Holy Eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly feast of the Lamb at which our transfiguration will be complete. Transfiguration glory remains in this holy house, and by God's grace it will remain until that glorious day when Christ will come on the clouds of glory, when we shall be raised incorruptible and glorious, perfectly transfigured into God's holy people.

If you wonder if you are being transfigured, remember this! In every act of genuine love performed by you, a bit of transfiguration glory shines forth. In every welcoming smile, in every kind word your whole demeanor reflects transfigured glory and light. In every witness to the faith and hope that is in you, glory shines forth. The amazing thing is that those with whom you have contact and dealings begin to recognize that you really are different, that your being is somehow transfigured. That is the changeless mystery that we celebrate today!

If we attempt to see into the future of Immanuel Church we will undoubtedly see times that are constantly changing, times when the Church will be in favor and times when the Church will be out of favor in the world. We will see times of prosperity and times of recession. We will see all sorts of powers at work in the world. All of that is part of the history of the Church in the world. We need not fear whatever the future may bring because we know that God does not change. As long as the world endures God will be at work through Word and Sacraments to transform and transfigure all who come to Him in faith. The transfiguration seen in the face of the Lord Jesus will little by little be seen in us and all who follow Him in faith. Christ has come into the world that we might be like Him. As He was transfigured even so we are being transfigured. That will not change, and that is the cause of our celebration today. Amen!