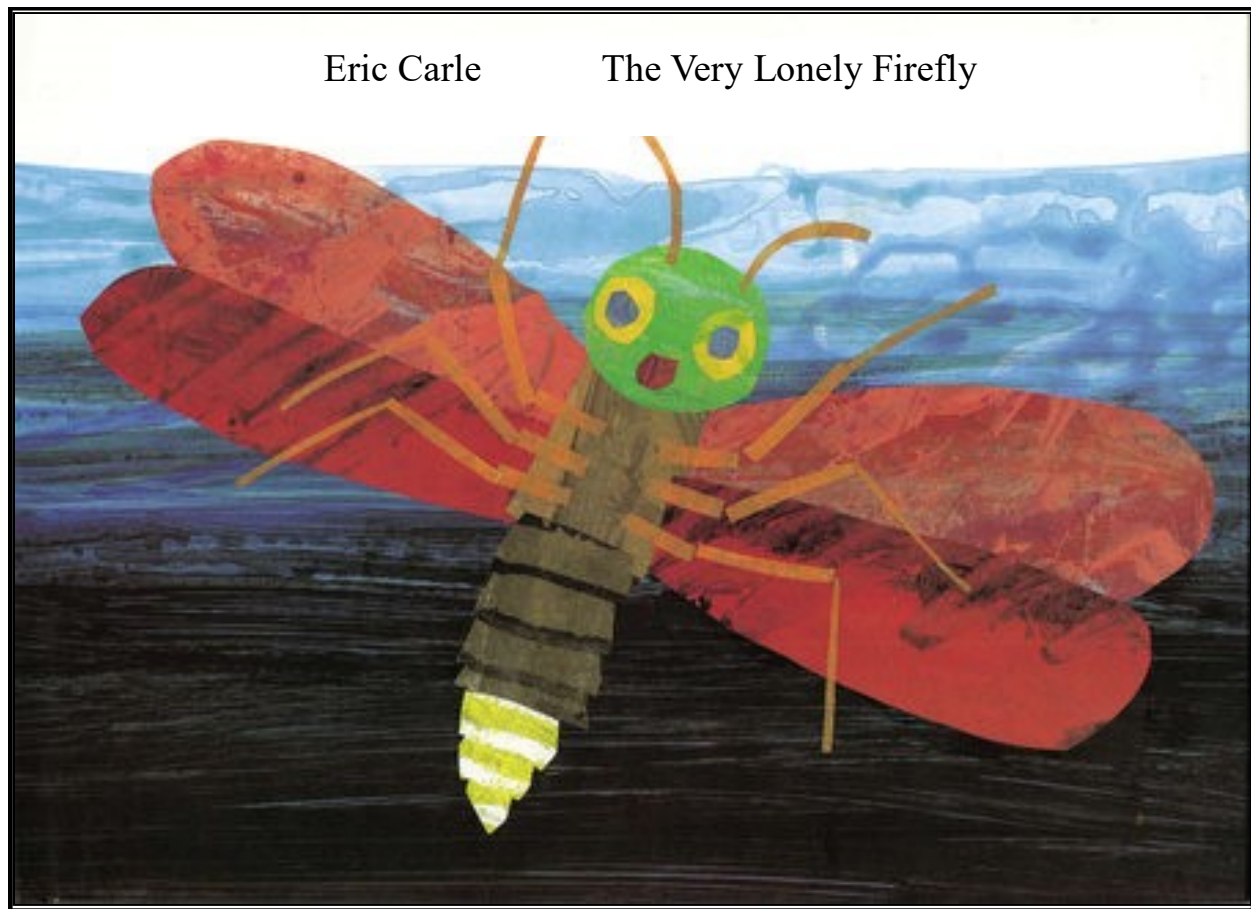


Living Grace

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT
CYCLE A

"CHARGED BY GOD"



*In **The Very Lonely Firefly**, a firefly is born as the sun sets. "It stretched its wings and flew off into the darkening sky." Searching for other fireflies, the lonely little guy flies hopefully toward other lights - a bulb in a window, a candle, a flashlight, the shining eyes of an owl, car headlights, fireworks - only to discover that they are not what he is looking for. He rejoices when eventually finds a whole group of fireflies - literally blinking all over the last page - a community of friends where he finally belongs!*

Read-aloud video link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XrPyF4Mpl4

Sunday Gospel

MATTHEW 17:1-9

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother,
and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them;

his face shone like the sun

and his clothes became white as light.

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them,
conversing with him.

Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,

“Lord, it is good that we are here.

If you wish, I will make three tents here,

one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, behold,

a bright cloud cast a shadow over them,

then from the cloud came a voice that said,

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;
listen to him.”

When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate
and were very much afraid.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying,

“Rise, and do not be afraid.”

And when the disciples raised their eyes,

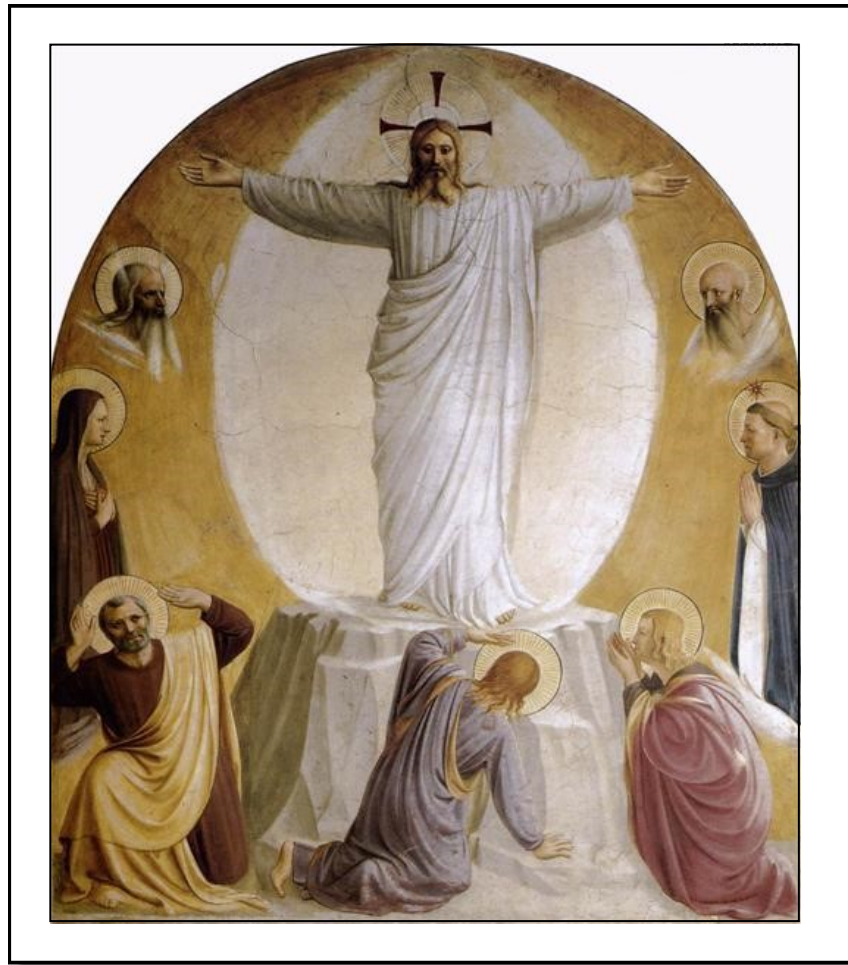
they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain,

Jesus charged them,

“Do not tell the vision to anyone

until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”



THE TRANSFIGURATION
Fresco by Fra Angelico ~ 1436
Convento di San Marco ~ Florence, Italy

EXPLORING THE ART:

A RARE & PERFECT TALENT

Fra Angelico was a Dominican friar, a member of the religious order founded by St. Dominic, as well as an Italian painter of the Early Renaissance. He has been described as having "a rare and perfect talent", and he is known primarily for the series of frescoes he made for his own friary, San Marco, in Florence.

Fra Angelico created these paintings on the walls of the friary simply as aids to contemplation, meditation, and prayer, but they have become known as some of the most amazing masterpieces of Western art. This series of frescoes expresses Angelico's deep reverence for God and his knowledge and love of humanity. The translation of the Dominican name given to him means "Angelic Friar", further expressing the divine beauty of the images he painted.

The frescoes of the friary fall into two groups - those for communal contemplation in the shared spaces of the friary, and those for private meditation in the individual rooms of the Dominican friars, such as the image of the Transfiguration above. The brother who inhabited each small room (called cells) had a vivid reminder of one of the events in the life of Christ. The cells, originally hidden from public view because of monastic vows of reclusion, reveal the secret joy of the painter-friar in creating figures of righteousness for no other reason than to move his fellow friars to meditation and prayer. Can you even imagine the life-changing impact of sharing a small room with this painting every day?!

Fra Angelico's frescoes have an especially beautiful simplicity as he depicts the events in the life of Christ using only bare essential elements of each scene without any excessive use of artistic details such as color, decoration, or narrative, which would detract from the essence of the story's meaning and power.

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

GOD'S LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN CHARGED AND CHANGED BY THE POWER OF GOD, AND THEY FIND THEIR IDENTITY IN COMMUNITY.

As Christians at some point on our journey we wonder, "When did Jesus know who he was and the mission he was called to?" There are many scholarly views in this regard. For our purposes, *The Lonely Firefly* can help us to understand a great deal. Jesus, like the Lonely Firefly, came to know who he was in the affirmation of community. It takes courage and fortitude to stay on the journey and to keep searching until we find our home, our community. The lonely firefly goes out looking to find an essence in others that he possesses in himself. We too discover a sense of who we are when we find people with whom we share common values, faith, or calling.

In the transfiguration Jesus is lifted up and filled with a transforming light. Then, like the firefly, is returned to his natural state. As amazing as that experience had to be for Jesus, his life would never be the same because of who he was ignited with, and who it was witnessed by. Jesus in the Transfiguration, is identified by God as a leader and prophet along with Moses and Elijah. Elijah was a well-known prophet of the Jewish people, and Moses was considered a leader and spiritual father to the Jewish people. Jesus is identified both audibly and visually by who he is raised up to be in company with. Things will never be the same! As James, John, and Peter experience this amazing enlightened knowledge they too are forever changed and charged for God's mission in Jesus. They now knew for sure who Jesus was.

Like Jesus, we need our family and our faith community to witness to the presence and power of God in our lives. The apostles now present the true identity of Jesus. Sometimes those who love us see greatness in us that we can't yet see in ourselves! In the apostle's astonishment, God helps them, and us today, by revealing how to discover our call to be "changed and charged" by God. "This is my beloved son, LISTEN to him". We need to listen to Jesus in every area of our lives. He will lead us and guide us to experience the power and presence of God within, and to find our community and calling.

The Firefly becomes a beautiful creature that can spark our imagination for the transfiguration of Jesus. The Firefly has moments of brilliance, but then returns to its ordinary state. Like Jesus, we too are 'Beloved' in our times of brilliance, our times of darkness, our times of searching, and during our ordinary times as well.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: Have you ever seen a firefly before? How do you think its light works? Does it stay on all the time? Does it change the way the firefly looks afterwards?

THE CHILDRENS' STORY: How did the firefly understand more fully his special gift when he found other's like himself?

THE GOSPEL STORY: What happened to Jesus in the Transfiguration? What do you think his disciples thought? Do you think it changed their understanding of who Jesus is? Do you think it took them awhile to get used to this new understanding of Jesus? When Jesus was seen with "others like himself", Elijah and Moses, how might he and the disciples understand more fully who he was?

The light of a firefly gives off a luminous presence, but scientists still don't know how it works. How does the Holy Spirit give off a luminous presence in our lives? Even though we can't explain how the Holy Spirit works in our lives, people can see evidence of the grace and power of God at work in us! How does it change us, and how are we still the same? How might we understand more fully who we are when we find others who share gifts of a similar light?

Biblical Background

MATTHEW 17:1-9

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: This event takes place on the south slopes of Mt. Hermon, the highest mountain in Israel, which rises to 9101 feet above sea level. Recall that the disciples began this journey to the foot of Mt. Hermon, and the city of Caesarea Philippi from Galilee, which sits at nearly 800 feet below sea level. This is quite an ascent, and it would have taken the better part of a week to arrive at Caesarea Philippi. The disciples and Jesus stay in Caesarea Philippi for six days before Jesus takes three of the disciples, Peter, James and his brother John, to the site of the event. Jesus would not have had to ascend to the very highest point of the mountain and more than likely would have been transfigured somewhere along the route toward the high pass that leads to ancient Damascus further to the north. This fact may be indicated in the statement of Peter that they should build shrines to commemorate the event so that others can make pilgrimage to the site. This would suggest that the event happened along a major road, or perhaps not too distant from the same.

TERMS: *Transfigured* The term is seen for the first and only time in the Gospel narrative. The appearance of Jesus is changed in such a dramatic manner that those who witness the event are almost at a loss to describe what they see. The term can suggest a radical change in appearance that we might easily associate with the change of a caterpillar into a butterfly if the process were to suddenly occur in an instant before our eyes. The difference being that after the experience Jesus is returned to his original state unlike the butterfly.

Moses and Elijah Theologically Moses and Elijah represent the Torah (the first five books of the Bible that claim Moses as their author) and the rest of the Bible books that are "prophetic" in the sense that God speaks in the spirit through men in all of these texts. Elijah holds the unique position among the Biblical prophets due to the fact that he did not suffer death but was assumed into Heaven, riding a the fiery chariot of the Lord into the sky. Jewish traditional teaching also taught that Moses was also assumed into heaven. This teaching is part of the official oral tradition of Judaism and was taught to Jesus as a young man. The fact that Moses appears alongside of Elijah and they both speak to Jesus would seem to confirm this aspect of Jewish traditional teaching.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: After the event is completed Jesus tells the three disciples not to tell anyone what they have experienced and, to our surprise, they do not. Normally a secret is meant to be shared up and down the grapevine of Middle Eastern cultural expectation. The fact that the disciples did not speak of this event to the other disciples is quite unusual. Why would they literally hold their tongues? The answer is found in the directive of Jesus that they were not to tell anyone about this experience "until" he had risen from the grave. It is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus qualifies his expectations concerning the sharing of a secret. The three disciples know that he wants them to keep the experience to themselves and the Church believes that they did until after Jesus rose on the other side of the grave. Therefore we can imagine that it was important to them and to Jesus and for the fulfillment of the mission Jesus had come to do.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: The Transfiguration is recorded in all three synoptic gospels. This scene differs only in the way that each Gospel author describes the appearance of Jesus, from a bright bolt of lightning to the whitest bleached garment anyone had ever seen. Jesus' identity is revealed in this powerful moment by the voice of his heavenly Father, and also by the presence of Moses and Elijah who represent the law and the prophets.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Share with your family the God given gifts that you see in each other. How do you think you might be called to grow your gifts this Lent allowing God to “charge you” and send you to do his work in the world?

CHARACTER QUALITIES: **IGNITED BY THE SPIRIT**
DISCERNMENT OF GIFTS

ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Learn all you can about fireflies. Explore the various stages of development and the science that makes them ‘light up the darkness’. Where are they found? Look for stories that include experiences of fireflies in them. What qualities do people associate with fireflies? Make a decision as a family to get outside as much as you can during Lent to watch the magic of spring. Try to find as many examples of how God’s creatures and creations point us toward the dynamic of our relationship with God. Find ways to bring the spring inside symbolizing all the spiritual growth that is happening in your family during this Lenten season.

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT
CYCLE A

Living & Grace

GOSPEL ILLUSTRATION
BASED ON MATTHEW 17:1-9

"This is so NOT the artwork I was planning to do for the reading about the Transfiguration of Jesus! My intention was to illustrate the whole story: mountain-top setting, the disciples fainting in fear, and a majestic Jesus standing between Moses and Elijah. What kept coming to me, though, was: what must it have felt like for Jesus? What would it feel like for any of us to have such an experience of hearing God's voice telling us how beloved we are? All I could think about is the absolute joy and love he must have known."

~ Vicki Shuck



"Transfigured"
Vicki Shuck ©2017

"TRANSFIGURED"
by Vicki Shuck