

Year A, February 23, 2020  
Last Epiphany  
Christ Church, Mexia

As always, the last Sunday in Epiphany, before we go into Lent, is about the Transfiguration. It is an important event, especially as we begin the journey to Easter. It is reported in all three of the synoptic gospels. The Greek word from which transfigured is derived is “metamorpho” and it means to transform, literally or figuratively to change. And is this not what should happen when we come to know God, be in the presence of God?

And today, I'd like to talk about the transfiguration of this church over the past six years or so. The church has had a long, and I suspect, interesting history, about which I wish I knew more. And fortunately, there is an effort underway to capture and record that history. However, I can't imagine that there is a more extraordinary time than the period between about 2001 to 2013, when you, the lay members, kept this church alive and well. I have heard much credit given to Ben and Peggy and P.K. and Margaret, and I am aware of others who also gave much in the service of the church. It was truly a remarkable time. And all of you, even those who have joined more recently, have continued this work – for which I am most grateful. But there have been some notable changes.

The church, as I recall, had a more inward orientation in late 2013. And I don't mean that in a critical way, but rather as an observation. And it is perfectly understandable. And I believe something Ben shared with me years ago confirms that observation. The church bell used to sit on the ground among overgrown bushes and vines at the front of the church. And when you were constructing the bell tower and cleaning up the landscaping, a man driving by, stopped and said that it looked good. He was surprised though, because he had thought the church had been closed; he didn't think it was being used.

Then a new logo was developed, a new roof and painting of the outside was completed, new signage placed on the corner, the Parish Hall was dramatically transformed, the kneelers in the church were made much more comfortable and the trees and shrubs around the

Simmons House were trimmed. These are just a few of things, but it is not just the physical facilities that have been transfigured.

Although outreach, especially to families in need at Thanksgiving and Christmas, had been a part of the history, as well as supporting several outside ministries, you began to do even more. And last year with the Blessing of the Animals and the yard sale, you finally sent a wonderful notice that we are here. And now we are on the eve of an opportunity to expand our service, our presence to the community. Remember this candle? I lit it over a year ago and asked that it serve as a reminder to you to think of ways in which we might use the Simmons House. And last spring we learned of an opportunity to partner with a new nonprofit organization that was beginning in Mexia – an organization to serve the poor and homeless here. It was a wonderful opportunity that allowed us to overcome some of our weaknesses, such as our homes being spread out over three counties with few people residing here, that many of us are older, and that we are relatively few in number.

Sadly, after obtaining estimates to repair and restore the home, while considering its configuration and our estimates of future needs, the Bishop's Committee came to the realization that a new facility would be more beneficial than the current house. The cost of a new facility, while more expensive, was not unreasonably more than estimates to refurbish the existing building, especially when factoring in the limitations of a two-story structure, the 100-year old frame, and likely difference in future maintenance and utility costs. The new facility also provides uses for our church in terms of more usable office space, meeting/educational rooms so that we are not trying to do everything in the Parish Hall, as lovely as it is. Sadly, we lost three members last year and we did not have a good place for the families to gather before the services, for example. And while a new facility can accommodate some additional needs for us, it offers the possibility for us to reach out more to the community. In addition to office space for nonprofits, a common area can offer a place where we or others could provide a range of services, such as, tax/financial help, job training, medical check-ups/immunizations, well-being/exercise programs, meeting facilities for veterans, addiction, grief, LGBTQ groups, or for spiritual formation or Bible study. The

opportunities are endless, and we need to explore them. Suffice it to say that it can be even more transformational for us.

And I think it fits with a sentiment from St. Basil the Great: “This is how you pray continually – not by offering prayer in words, but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so that your life becomes one continuous and uninterrupted prayer.” May God’s blessing continue to be on us and guide our constant transformation. And may we continue to be a blessing to others.

In the name of the One God - the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.  
Amen.