

## Why We Need The Transfiguration Of Jesus

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus who is the Christ, who came to vanquish Sin, Death, and the Devil, Amen.

Do any of you watch the Transformer movies? I'll be honest, I stopped watching after about the first 3 or 4. (SLIDE) As I was thinking about what to say about the Transfiguration of Jesus I was reminded of the Transformer movie franchise. I was shocked to learn there has been no less than 7 full length features depicting everything from sports cars to Dump Trucks turning into alien robots. There's plans for at least 2 more in the works... It seems the world just can't get enough shape-shifting super robots. Don't believe it? (SLIDE) Consider this: The Transformer Movie Series is the 15th-highest-grossing film series, with a total of \$5.28 billion; two movies in the series have grossed over \$1 billion each. Despite being almost universally panned by movie critics, this is one of the most successful film franchises of all time. What's that mean? I'd say we're going to see a lot more talking robots in the future. That's what it means.

There are many theories as to why these movies, despite their poor critical reception, are such a hit with moviegoers. Some point to the nostalgia factor. Transformers was a popular series of toys in the late 1980s. (SLIDE) Those boys and girls who went crazy for Transformer toys are now moms and dads eager to show their sons and daughters how cool it can be when a rusty tractor morphs into a talking, flying superhero. There's also the fact that they're just plain fun to

## Why We Need The Transfiguration Of Jesus

watch. Amazing special effects, non-stop action and beautiful people diving for cover is good entertainment any way you slice it. I think what intrigues us most about Transformers is the transforming itself. There's magic and allure to the idea of something so basic and familiar as an automobile becoming something so powerful, so mysterious and so downright awesome. It makes us see the world around us, just for a second, as filled with new and exciting potential... (SLIDE) I mean, what if my car wasn't just a car? What if my desk wasn't just a desk? What if my toaster wasn't just a toaster? That would be an interesting world!

Seven times over the last fourteen summers, people all over the world have flocked to movie theaters, loaded down with popcorn, and ready to watch the same story all over again. You may think it a stretch, but a line can be drawn between the Transformers film franchise and the transfiguration of Jesus, as given to us in Mark's gospel. (SLIDE) Think about it. The tagline for the toys and films is, "More than meets the eye." Isn't that true for Jesus? The transfiguration is the moment where the disciples get a glimpse of who Jesus really is. This is the moment when they saw for certain Jesus was more than just a man. Jesus stood before his disciples, on the top of Mount Hermon, and before their eyes he changed. He changed from a rabbi with a keen connection to God, into a God-man, as I said last week, God with flesh on. The disciples saw Jesus as greater than Moses and Elijah put together. This glimpse of who Jesus would become -- of

## Why We Need The Transfiguration Of Jesus

who Jesus really was -- left the disciples slack-jawed and stunned. Their world suddenly had new and exciting potential. “What if my rabbi isn’t just a rabbi?!” See the connection? Oh, but there’s more.

Many of us respond to the idea of another Transformers movie with a sigh. So also, many hear about Transfiguration Sunday and let out the same disinterested puff of air. “It makes sense for us to circle back to Christmas and Easter. I mean, those are the biggies. I’ll bet nobody’s having ham or turkey today to celebrate this great event in the life of Jesus Christ... Why do we circle back to this Transfiguration Sunday every year? After all, hasn’t it become clear that Jesus is God? Haven’t we already established the fact he’s not just a man but divine? Seriously, we just saw this movie with this same plot last year. Why do we find ourselves here again?” (SLIDE)

Let’s assume that, in the words of a well-intentioned and awestruck Peter and in the words of our Gathering Hymn, “... it is good for us to be here” (v. 5). Let’s assume the reason we tread this same old familiar ground of Jesus’ Transfiguration is not just because it’s what’s given to us for this Sunday in the Lectionary, but because it’s actually good for us as his disciples to hear this amazing story yet again. Here’s at least one good reason. We spend a great deal of energy as people trying to transform Jesus. We morph and manipulate him into something he’s not, something that fits our agenda and not God’s Will. It’s good

## Why We Need The Transfiguration Of Jesus

for us to be confronted with the truth that Jesus is not who we've made him out to be. Not even close. He's so much greater than we've assumed. He's holier than we give him credit for and better than we've imagined. We need the transfiguration because it breaks our idolatrous and self-serving ideas of Jesus and brings us back to the jaw-dropping, breathtaking truth of who and what this Jesus really is. Several years ago there was a bestselling T-shirt that said, "Jesus is my homeboy." (SLIDE) Maybe you've turned Jesus into your own personal divine affirmer. Your 'transformed' Jesus never confronts you with the law in order to draw you back to the gospel, but is only there to say, "I got your back, buddy!" (SLIDE) Another way we transform Jesus is by making him into our own personal trump card. We pull him out when logical arguments fail. My personal favorite is using Jesus as some kind of slot machine in the sky. When we need healing for ourselves, a sick family member, or a beloved friend, we trot out The Healer Jesus and shoot up a couple of prayers to our Jesus Idol.

This is why we need the transfiguration. This is why we revisit this familiar territory, year after year. (SLIDE) We come back to this particular storyline because in the last year we've all built our own unique, but false picture of Jesus. We've laid our assumptions, our agendas and our designs upon Him. We've sat with him -- knowing there's more than meets the eye and tried to turn him into

## Why We Need The Transfiguration Of Jesus

something that suits our fancy. Transfiguration Sunday exists to remind us of who Jesus really is and who we need him to be.

When Jesus transforms from car to alien robot, er, I mean from an apparently mortal man to glorified God in flesh, we, like those first disciples, get a glimpse of the real glory of our God in the flesh. We've tried to morph Jesus into our likeness, but today we see Him in Glory.

In the same way many people will leave the theater later this year raving about the special effects in Transformers 8, we can leave our annual pilgrimage to Mount Hermon praising the awesomeness of Jesus and thanking God for using His almighty power to forgive our sins rather than squash us for our idolatry. As we leave here today to watch the world's most watched sporting event, may we say to ourselves, "Yeah, okay, the story wasn't anything new, but it still makes me say, 'Wow!'" Why do we need another Transformers movie? Some would argue that we don't. Seven is enough, but consider that there were eight Harry Potter films and 25 James Bond movies. Did you know there have been 10 Batman movies? So maybe an 8<sup>th</sup> Transformer film isn't all that bad. At the very least, every once in a while, we need a Transformers movie to remind us how great of an actor Mark Wahlberg is and how truly awful it would be to live in a world with talking cars. And every once in a while we need the transfiguration to remind us that, even though anthropomorphic alien robot cars do not exist, Jesus does. And he could

## Why We Need The Transfiguration Of Jesus

crush every single one of those alien anthropomorphic cars. Now that would make for a great movie.

Jesus isn't just a great teacher. He's greater than the great teacher Moses and the great prophet Elijah. They bow to him. Jesus isn't just an enlightened man. He's God in flesh and his glory shines brighter than clothes could ever be bleached. He's not your card to be played in arguments or a puppet at your beck and call; he's the Father's "beloved Son." We listen to him. He rules over us. Every once in a while we need him to bust out of whatever box we've placed him in. We need to see Jesus transform into his glorious self, and remind us that he is the one true God. May Jesus, God in the Flesh, transform you into his disciple and follower for the sake of this world. Amen.