

Church of All Nations
Transfiguration Sunday
March 2, 2025

Today we wrap up the season of Epiphany and on Wednesday - Ash Wednesday - we enter the season of Lent.

And every year on this last Sunday of Epiphany we have the story that we call the Transfiguration. When Jesus takes three of his inner sanctum of disciples with him as he climbs a mountain and he glows with radiance and the glory of God comes upon him and we hear a voice declare that Jesus is the Beloved... the Son of God... listen to him.

And he has company: Moses, Elijah, both long gone, presiders over the Bible's two pillars, law and prophets, and both with downright baffling deaths, departures, and lack of burial. I love the simple detail: "They were talking with him." Maybe the three greatest ever, chatting, in conversation. The intimacy, the love, the wisdom. What were they talking about? we don't know.

It is a story we cannot explain, or fully comprehend. It is a big story, one that is not exhausted on one or a hundred or a thousand readings. It is a story to return to many times, a story to feed the soul. And our souls desperately need feeding or else they shrivel and we perish.

First of all, there were those other guys. Luke says it was Moses and Elijah. Maybe Moses had his famous staff - the staff by which he parted the sea and then struck the rock to get water. Maybe Elijah had his wilderness clothes on, a John the Baptist motif that showed he was a man of the desert. They were in supporting roles on this day. It wasn't about them. They represented the law and the prophets, the story of the people of God,

The disciples first respond to the Transfigured Christ with fear. In our global time of crisis, this is where many of us are today. The disciples mirror the itinerary of the spiritual journey: we start out with many concerns, fears, and worries. Our minds and hearts are all over the place. But Jesus comes, touches them, and says, "Get up and do not be afraid." When the three disciples raise their eyes, they see nothing but one image: Jesus. Their lives have become fully focused and simplified on the one thing that is good, the one thing they desire, and the one thing that is necessary.

But then Jesus leads them down the mountain, back into the ordinary world to continue his labor of love, healing. We can't stay on the mountaintop forever. And then Jesus ends with a line that to me was always a disappointment: don't tell anybody about what just happened. He might be saying, "Don't tell this story to someone else, because they'll think they understand it just by hearing about it." Religious experience has to be experienced firsthand. We can't believe it because someone else talked about it. Sooner or later, we have to go to our own mountaintop. We have to have our own transfiguration, and we have to walk down the mountaintop into the ordinary world, on the path of suffering, and the path of love—which are, in the end, the same.

As is clear from the ending of the episode, where Jesus is alone, the point is not a change in Jesus, but a change in their understanding of who he is. The full truth will only come after his death and resurrection, but these privileged three have a foretaste, an anticipation ahead of time, which will

What happened on that mountain was not so much a change into something different, but a revealing of the essence of the one who was changed.

Transfiguration is a way of life, happening daily, as we see God with us and God with others. Sometimes it will be a mountain top experience, but often it's much more ordinary: we see transfiguration in another individual as we accept them for who they are; as we see things bravely overcome; as we see people going more than the extra mile for another; and as we affirm that we all are simply children of God, members of Christ and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

And so today's story of glory is our last gospel reading before we again enter lent with its confronting challenge to take up the cross and follow Jesus. It is only on that road to Jerusalem and inevitable crucifixion that both the glory of transfiguration and the glory of the lowly way are mingled so they become one way, one path. As Jesus says to his friends, it is only those who have walked this path who have learnt to speak of what true glory is. It is hard enough to talk of these things later but pre-crucifixion it is too easy to bask in the applause and recognition of the world.

In Lent we head towards another scene on a hill when Jesus has as companions not Moses and Elijah, two eminent and revered authority figures of his nation's religion, but two anonymous criminals. On that day when the glory of God is revealed in the cross, not dazzling light, but total darkness descends. Yet the glory of God must have also present that day for when a Roman officers sees he declares, "Surely he is the Son of God".