

The Transfiguration—Year A
Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm 99
II Peter 1:13-21
Luke 9:28-36

This is one of those unusual occurrences when a major feast of the Lord, **the feast of the Transfiguration**, lands on a Sunday, and so this feast takes precedence over our regular Sunday lessons. Oh, that's some geeky, church nerd information that is probably more than you wanted to know.

Every year, we get these lessons about the **transfiguration on the last Sunday after the Epiphany**. Right before we head into **Lent**, we go to the *mountaintop* to breathe deep and get renewed before that long Lenten journey that will lead us to **Holy Week and Easter**. So, what does it mean when we get these lessons right smack in the middle of this long **season of ordinary time that stretches from Pentecost**, back at the beginning of June, all the way to the end of November, when **Advent** will start the cycle all over again? What does it mean to be *transfigured in ordinary time*?

Let's start with the Collect for today: **Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may by faith behold the King in his beauty**. Oh, those words are **balm in Gilead**. Anybody feeling the **disquietude** of this world lately? **Disquietude**—Webster's defines it as *anxiety* and *agitation*—busted! We get to acknowledge right here and right now that this world is full of *anxiety* and *agitation*, and frankly, we're going to step out of that stew for just a bit, and climb up a *mountain*, **so that** we can look at things from *a different vantage point*, so that we can, literally, get *a different point of view*.

Up we go with **Peter, James, and John**, and all eyes are on **Jesus**. Before he looks out, he *centers* himself; he **prays**; Jesus *opens* himself to God. And as he enters that sacred space, that holy encounter, his face becomes *different*—literally, it becomes *another*. You see, as we spend time with God, **our likeness changes**, more and more, *our face mirrors the divine*. And when that *interior space changes*, the *outer appearance takes on a different countenance*. In this instance, **Jesus' clothes became dazzling white**. That's a miracle! But is it any less miraculous when a burden that's been weighing us down *lifts* and all of the sudden we're standing straight and tall again?

Suddenly, *the weight of the whole tradition is standing there with Jesus*, **all the law, Moses, and all the prophets, Elijah**. In an instant, **Peter, James, and John** could see that *all that had led up to now* was finding its *integration here*, with Jesus. Paradoxes abound! **Jesus was radically different, and yet in complete continuity with these great spiritual streams**.

And the conversation at hand? It was all about **his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem**. But the greek takes us deeper. *This conversation* was about **Jesus' exodus which he was about to bring to completion in the journey that will be his in Holy Week**, *a journey of yielding and surrender and holding in tension all that wants to fight and fly apart*. **Exodus** calls to mind *the great deliverance of the children of Israel out of slavery*; **exodus** calls to mind that *arduous walk to freedom that has to wander around a good long time in the wilderness*. This was no small conversation amongst **Moses and Elijah and Jesus**.

And once again, **the disciples are weighed down with sleep, depressed with sleep, a spiritual torpor** Strong's Concordance calls it, *spiritual apathy*. All the things swirling around us can absolutely **weigh us down** and take us to a place of *apathy* because *it's just too much*. But even with that **weight pushing down upon them, they were able to stay awake**, just enough, to *catch a glimpse of Jesus' glory*.

Oh my, we might need to just stop right here. Amidst all that would **weigh down upon us**, can we manage just enough **awakeness** to *keep one eye on Jesus, one eye looking for a glimpse of his glory*? *One eye*, just partly open, is *enough for God to work with*. *One eye* will allow us to *begin to see*, and *having seen just a bit of glory*, *we'll want to see more*.

That's what happened to **Peter, James, and John**. They saw the vision of this *integration* of all that **was and could be** with the holy presence that simply **is**, and it was **glorious**. And **as the men part**, and the scene fades—as it always does because we just can't tolerate that intensity of **glory** all the time in our flesh and blood, human containers—as **Moses and Elijah were parting from Jesus, Peter** gets a grand idea, **“Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah; let us make three σκηνῶς, three tabernacles, three holy containers where this glory may live.”**

Tabernacle is such a beautiful word and idea—it's the **tabernacle** that allows the *people of Israel to carry God's glory and God's presence as they wander through the wilderness*; it's the **tabernacle** that will *house that glory in the Temple*; in **John's gospel**—God literally *itches his tent, tabernacles, in our human flesh in Jesus*, and in that act, *makes all of our human flesh tabernacles of God's glorious presence*.

The challenge with **tabernacles** is *we fix them* in a certain place or time or doctrine or ritual or experience; you know, those *mountaintop experiences*, but *God doesn't like to be fixed* in a time or place or doctrine or ritual or experience; **when God tabernacles, it's a verb; it's God locating God's glory among us, and that happens in all kinds of ways**.

Sure enough, every time we try to pin God's **glory** down, we'll find ourselves **overshadowed by the cloud** to be sure. **The cloud** *interrupts* our regular sight, *disorients* us just enough **so that we can be reoriented to the voice**—the voice that is both *beyond* us in **Majestic Glory** and *within* us in **sighs too deep for words**. And make no mistake, it is **terrifying to enter that cloud**, and the fact that **we have to enter that cloud** tells me that **we have a choice**—we *could choose* to just go back into our **depressed, apathetic state of sleep**. **But once you've caught a glimpse of glory, staying asleep is just not enough**. From that cloud came a voice that said, **“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”**

It's interesting, when **Peter** later recounts this in **II Peter**, **Peter** *ties these words they heard on the holy mountain with Jesus back to the words that the Majestic Glory (what a great name for God!) conveyed to Jesus at his baptism*—**“This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”** And **Peter** would only have known about Jesus's baptismal experience *if Jesus had told that story to Peter* and the disciples. Hearing **“you're Beloved”**—this is the organizing principle, the center, the core, the *everything* for Jesus. All the rest pours out from this point—he's **God's Son**; he's **Beloved**; and **God is well pleased with him**. *That's where he begins; that's where we all begin*.

God has made a choice—that’s what it means to be **Chosen**—**God has made a choice, for us, for all of us.** *We are God’s daughters and sons; we are Beloved; in us, God is well pleased.* The **Majestic Glory** tells us to **listen to Jesus**, which means *taking these words to heart and putting them on an endless loop in our minds*—“**You’re my daughter, you’re my son; you’re Beloved; in you, I am well pleased.**”

Peter goes on in that letter to describe *this* as “**the prophetic message confirmed,**” and so it is. In this culture of *never enough and endless comparison, criticism, blame, and cynicism*, claiming that **our DNA is divine, knowing that we are Beloved, and believing deep down that we are well pleasing to God**—this is **prophetic**, indeed.

And **Peter** goes on, calling us to **be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place.** It’s a **lamp, a small light shining in a dark, dark place, but it is enough.** *If we are attentive, this lamp will keep the light burning until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts and we are ablaze with light, radiant.* And in that moment, we *ourselves* will be **transfigured**, and others will *look at us* and see that *mirror reflection of the Majestic Glory.* It might **frighten them** at first, just as it did **the people of Israel when Moses came out from his God encounters with the skin of his face shining**, but we’ll find our way. Others will begin to know *there is nothing to fear*, and *we’ll figure out how to live with that much power flowing through us*, knowing **when to veil it and when to let it shine full on.**

So, it’s the middle of **ordinary time**, and yet, *this ordinary time* is **no ordinary time** at all—**the world is full of disquietude.**

Come on up **the mountain.** Jesus knows there’s **a lot weighing us down**, but **keep one eye on him**, best as you can. *Trust* that *that* will be **enough**, and **God will take it from there.** Be prepared to **see glory and hear glory, Majestic Glory**, in ways and in places and in voices that you never expected.

Let this glory **ignite the lamp that you can carry into the dark**, and then carry that **lamp** back **down the mountain and into Jerusalem.** Carry it **to the cross and unto death and into hell.** Carry that **lamp** until **the day dawns and the morning star indeed rises in your heart.**

Then, *you won’t need to build a booth to contain it*; then, that **glory** will have **pitched it’s tent in you**, and **you’ll tabernacle that glory.** And in that moment, **disquietude** or not, **the world** will know that **glory** lives among them. Amen.

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