

Transfiguration of our Lord
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This Sunday is a transition point in the church year, for this week we will begin the journey of Lent that will lead us to the cross and the grave, and then to the empty tomb and Jesus' glorious resurrection. The road to the passion of Christ is before us and although we know how the story turns out, we know that Jesus also knew how it would turn out, even before it all happened. And I'm sure Jesus also knew how his disciples would react when they saw him taken captive, crucified, and killed.

Jesus realized that there wasn't anything about his appearance as a human being, which in any way identified him to his disciples as the Son of God that he was, nothing to attract them to him and keep them attached to him through his awful suffering and death. So to keep them from being totally disillusioned and desert him altogether, he permitted them a peek into the company of heaven – that they might know him, not only as the suffering son of Man, but also as the beloved Son of God. And this text serves to give us a glimpse of Jesus in this way as well.

Our gospel reading today, describes the event we call the transfiguration, when Jesus revealed a little more of his true nature to a few select disciples, as he communed with God and shone like the sun. The witnesses to this event remembered that incredible moment with Jesus. Later on, Peter wrote, "We were witnesses of his majesty; we heard the voice from heaven; we were with him on the Holy Mountain."

That moment, coupled with their even more magnificent moments with him after he had risen from the dead, helped transform them from wavering followers to fearless apostles. And it helped keep them going in later years even when they got into all kinds of trouble, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

There are so many wonderful aspects of this story....

Jesus is the Son of God and yet he models for us a responsible approach to leadership in which he tests the views of those around him, and confers with his religious tradition, and the Will of God. Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah, he communes with God the Father through prayer, and receives the blessing of God's favor. Jesus does this before he moves down the road of the suffering servant toward the cross. Before moving ahead with whatever plans WE may have, for ourselves, our families, our church or our faith life, perhaps we should follow this model as well and consult with the experts in our tradition and thoroughly envelop our plans with prayer.

I'm always interested in those persons who don't want to be thought of as religious people, who want nothing to do with a tradition or a church because they prefer to be known as independent thinkers. Independent thinkers who do not consult with a tradition, with experts, or with peers, can be dangerous people. None of us has the wisdom or insight to act without careful reflection, without learning from the past – and that includes interaction with those from whom we receive our tradition.

As Christians, we acknowledge, that many people have come before us, and have wrestled with issues similar to our own. So we read the Bible, and let it inform and form us. We commit many of its passages to memory, and we allow those who have gone before us in faith to challenge us, to encourage us, and inspire us. Without their faith touching our own, when we encounter a problem in life, it can be like stumbling across a desert, with no oasis in sight. Sometimes leading others to follow our path into the desert, is like the blind leading the blind. Or it's like the wise old saying, "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." But when we build a foundation on the traditions of our faith, we have ample resources to draw from, to lead us to places where we can be fruitful and multiply.

Jesus also shows us that we should seek such affirmation in retreat-like settings, to get out of the roar of the crowd, so that we can consult our sources and make reflections in peace. Jesus would often get away from the crowds for some time of solitude and prayer and this message cannot be over emphasized.

In the midst of our busy lives, I wonder how many of us have found a place where we can have a get-away retreat, and I wonder whether we regularly take time to get away, time to check our sources before making plans, before taking the next steps on whatever we feel called to, which will not only affect us, but also our families, our colleagues, our friends.

When Jesus brings his disciples to such a place to retreat, and consult with, and be with God, Peter immediately starts getting busy, to capture the moment, he says, "it is good for us to be here, if you wish I will make three dwellings here for each of you..... But before he could go on, suddenly he is interrupted by a great voice, it is the voice of God saying "Listen!!!" The sudden interruption says, "Peter, just stop everything, and listen".....And then God says, "This is my Son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him."

And I believe that continues to be good advice for us today
Stop everything and listen, listen to what Jesus teaches us through his words in scripture...stop everything and listen! Turn off all the busy-ness and all the buzzing in our ears and take time to be with God and listen, and we too, will have a mountaintop experience with God.

Mountaintop experiences describe those rare, exotic moments when you know for sure that God is with you. They are wonderful, it's like being on top of a mountain where it seems like you can see forever, when everything is crystal clear, there is no fog, no obstacles, and no matter where you look in any direction you see pure beauty. These are those special times when we see with the most clarity available to us, who God is. And we know for sure that the vision is true. And those times can inspire us to look at the world in a new way and strive to make a difference.

When we hear this Biblical story for today about a vision on a mountaintop, it's hard for me not to think of Martin Luther King, Jr. In probably his most famous sermon, he said,

“I have been to the mountain, and I have seen the promised land.” King had a vision of the Promised Land where black and white would live together in peace, where black and white would live together as family, as brothers and sisters, a vision of God’s creation between the races. Dr. King had a vision, and he believed that vision, in fact, he gave his life for the vision.

We need a vision too. We need a vision to see the possibilities in life, to see beyond the problems, and past the haze and the fog and the trees and the obstructions, for there are many of them. We need to see past all the hindrances, to see the possibilities. We need to see visions for our lives. We need to see visions for our marriage, visions for our children, visions for our work, our vocation. We need to be above the fog and haze. Visions are moments of truth, where we know for sure about God and His destiny for our lives.

You see God put us on the earth for a reason. We have a purpose, in fact, we have several purposes: To love that child, to raise our family in a godly way, to take care of our mother or father, to be that teacher, that plumber, that engineer. Have you been to the mountain? Have you had visions? Have you been able to see everything so clearly that you know for sure that you are loved by God? Sometimes we have to get away, we have to go to that mountain, so we can see God, because the world around us will paint a very different picture.

In the transfiguration, Jesus **clothes** shine with the glory of God;
at the crucifixion, the soldiers gamble over his clothes.
In the transfiguration, Jesus is declared to be **God’s Son** by the voice of God,
at the crucifixion, the words, “he said, I’m God’s son”
were used by the religious authorities to mock and slander Jesus.
At the transfiguration, Moses and **Elijah** confer with Jesus then depart, leaving him to stand in infinite glory,
at the crucifixion, Jesus hangs on the cross in humiliation while the crowd stands around waiting to see “Whether **Elijah** will come to save him.”
So even though our world provides one story we should
read one story in light of the other, for just as we see Jesus in shining glory today, it is through His suffering by which **our glory** will be won.

So as we enter into the Season of Lent, we enter into a time of reflection, a time to consider the wealth of wisdom of our religious tradition. It’s a time to dream dreams, a time to envision our future with God. A time to embrace the love of God and move confidently into the future. For just as Jesus was transformed, may we be transformed in our thinking about Jesus, about his mission and our mission in the world. Amen