

Sunday Lesson – Feb 14, 2021

GOSPEL: Luke 9: 28-45

Transfiguration

Background

“In Luke 9, the Transfiguration story is directly preceded by a conversation about Jesus’ identity. When Jesus asks who others think he is, the disciples answer, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen” (Luke 9:19). Jesus responds with a follow-up question: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answers, “The Messiah of God” (Luke 9:20). This means that when Jesus takes Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray in Luke 9:28, the audience has very recently heard Peter’s Messianic confession. Jesus’ identity should be fresh in their minds.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/transfiguration-3/commentary-on-luke-928-45-2)*

Insight

“Undoubtedly, the purpose of the transfiguration of Christ into at least a part of His heavenly glory was so that the “inner circle” of His disciples could gain a greater understanding of who Jesus was. Christ underwent a dramatic change in appearance in order that the disciples could behold Him in His glory. The disciples, who had only known Him in His human body, now had a greater realization of the deity of Christ, though they could not fully comprehend it. That gave them the reassurance they needed after hearing the shocking news of His coming death. Symbolically, the appearance of Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets. But God’s voice from heaven – “Listen to Him!” - clearly showed that the Law and the Prophets must give way to Jesus. The One who is the new and living way is replacing the old – He is the fulfillment of the Law and the countless prophecies in the Old Testament. Also, in His glorified



form they saw a preview of His coming glorification and enthronement as King of kings and Lord of lords.” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/transfiguration.html)*

Gospel Reading

“About eight days after saying this, he climbed the mountain to pray, taking Peter, John, and James along. While he was in prayer, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became blinding white. At once two men were there talking with him. They turned out to be Moses and Elijah—and what a glorious appearance they made! They talked over his exodus, the one Jesus was about to complete in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Peter and those with him were slumped over in sleep. When they came to, rubbing their eyes, they saw Jesus in his glory and the two men standing with him. When Moses and Elijah had left, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, this is a great moment! Let’s build three memorials: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He blurted this out without thinking. While he was babbling on like this, a light-radiant cloud enveloped them. As they found themselves buried in the cloud, they became deeply aware of God. Then there was a voice out of the cloud: “This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him.” When the sound of the voice died away, they saw Jesus there alone. They were speechless. And they continued speechless, said not one thing to anyone during those days of what they had seen. When they came down off the mountain the next day, a big crowd was there to meet them. A man called from out of the crowd, “Please, please, Teacher, take a look at my son. He’s my only child. Often a spirit seizes him. Suddenly he’s screaming, thrown into convulsions, his mouth foaming. And then it beats him black-and-blue before it leaves. I asked your disciples to deliver him but they couldn’t.” Jesus said, “What a generation! No sense of God! No focus to your lives! How many times do I have to go over these things? How much longer do I have to put up with this? Bring your son here.” While he was coming, the demon

slammed him to the ground and threw him into convulsions. Jesus stepped in, ordered the foul spirit gone, healed the boy, and handed him back to his father. They all shook their heads in wonder, astonished at God's greatness, God's majestic greatness. While they continued to stand around exclaiming over all the things he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, "Treasure and ponder each of these next words: The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into human hands." They didn't get what he was saying. It was like he was speaking a foreign language and they couldn't make heads or tails of it. But they were embarrassed to ask him what he meant." *The Message*

What It Could Mean?

"Here in Luke, God both shows up to Jesus in a sense, and shows up *in* Christ Jesus—on a mountain, again, as God appeared to both Elijah (1 Kings 19) and Moses (Exodus 33) once before—with Christ's divinity "peeking through." Now Moses and Elijah are there again. This cannot be an accident.

What is more, in both Mark and Matthew when Moses and Elijah appear, the summary is that they are talking with Jesus; no other detail is given. Not so in Luke. In Luke, we learn that they are discussing, "his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." What this revelation does is to highlight the central place that the transfiguration (or the "becoming other") has in Luke's Gospel. In fact, one might argue that the transfiguration is the *exact* center of the Gospel of Luke. It both echoes how the story began, and foreshadows how it will end.

Looking Back: As Peter, James, and John are there on the mountain with Jesus, we read that, "a cloud came and **overshadowed** them." The overshadowing is the first reminiscence of the transfiguration to the beginning of Jesus' story.

Looking forward: Two more mountains are in Jesus' future: the Mount of Olives and Golgotha. Perhaps most importantly,

on that mountain (Golgotha) Jesus is transfigured again. He is shown to be a different kind of messiah than the disciples are expecting or ready for. On the mount of the transfiguration, we catch a glimpse of the divinity of Jesus, literally shining through. But in the crucifixion, we catch a glimpse...more than a glimpse..of what, in Christ Jesus, that divinity is for. It is for us.

When Jesus is finally revealed in his glory, we learn that his glory is not what we think we see. His true glory is other; something else altogether than. His true glory looks an awful lot like glory's opposite. His true glory is not to be found in a changed face or clothes of dazzling white, but outstretched arms and bloodied hands and feet.

The transfiguration, lying at the center of Luke's Gospel, points both backwards and forwards, drawing the gospel story together, from its humble beginnings, to its completely "other" conclusion." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by Karl Jacobson*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Matthew 17: 1-8 & Mark 9: 2-8](#) *Matthew & Mark versions*
- [John 1:14 & 2 Peter 1: 16-18](#) *Bearing witness of Transfiguration*

Thought for the Day

"God places us in the world as his fellow workers-agents of transfiguration. We work with God so that injustice is transfigured into justice, so there will be more compassion and caring, that there will be more laughter and joy, that there will be more togetherness in God's world." ~ *Desmond Tutu*

A Prayer

Dazzling Lord, in blinding light you showed your disciples a hint of your power and purpose. Reveal yourself to us today. Show us what you desire of us and how to broadcast your love to the world, for the sake of the one who keeps company with the prophets Moses and Elijah, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**