



## God's Beloved



*We've got some difficult days ahead.  
But it doesn't matter with me now.  
I just want to do God's will ..."*

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



*The glory of God is the human person fully alive;  
to be fully alive is to see God."*

St. Irenaeus of Lyons



*We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain."*

2 Peter 1:16-18 [NRSV]

### **Focus for this Session**

- Listening to Jesus, God's Beloved Son
- Being the Beloved of God
- Personal transfiguration
- Facing reality: in life and in faith

## GATHER

### Introductions

*If there are new members to the group since the first session, take a few moments to welcome them, and invite them to introduce themselves.*

### Opening Prayer



#### ***Suggested Song*** **Who Calls You by Name**

*Leader* Let us spend a few moments,  
becoming more aware of God's presence ...  
... God's presence in us and in this community,  
gathered in Jesus' name.

*Pause for a few moments of quiet.*  
*Then one of the members reads the following prayer:*

O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration  
of your Only Begotten Son  
confirmed the mysteries of faith by the witness  
of the Fathers  
and wonderfully prefigured our full adoption to  
sonship,  
grant, we pray, to your servants,  
that, listening to the voice of your beloved Son,  
we may merit to become co-heirs with him.  
Who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

*(Collect, The Transfiguration of the Lord, Roman Missal)*

**All** Amen.

### **Living Our Faith**

*Share briefly your experience of putting into effect the action you chose after the last session.*

## **BREAKING OPEN OUR STORY**

### **Reflection**

Most of us remember a particular family gathering when all “went well.” For me, it happened last year at Christmas. For a change, all of us were able to gather at my daughter’s house. Some of the family came by plane; others drove hundreds of miles, and eventually we were all there, happy to be together celebrating the birth of Jesus.

I must admit that I was skeptical. It seems that every one of these gatherings gets spoiled by an inconsequential argument. “You know that I am allergic to nuts, don’t you?” “We shouldn’t have brought the presents inside the house so soon; now the baby is destroying the wrappings!” etc., etc. In my mind I already pictured my husband getting upset, the children crying, and others complaining about the length of the trip. After a while, just as I was beginning to feel a wonderful period of peace coming to an end, my granddaughter announced that she was going to sing us a song that she had learned in school. “It is about the birth of Baby Jesus,” she proudly informed us. The conversations stopped and we all sat in a semi-circle pretending to be in a theater for the big performance.

After everyone quieted down, she started to sing “Away in a Manger.” You could have heard a pin drop. There was a reverent silence that could be touched and felt. As we say in some religious circles, “you could hear the angels’ wings.” Her soft voice and her bright eyes managed to convey in a very simple manner the depth of the celebration. Every time she repeated, “Be near me, Lord Jesus ...,” we were transported to the Nativity scene by the sweetness of her voice. It was one of those magical moments ... and, of course, it had to come to an end. After much clapping and affirmation, the children went on with their games and their noise. But somehow something had changed in us; we could sense it in the air. We were avoiding any new conversation for fear of breaking

the spell. Yet ... we knew that we had to go back to our sharing and even complaining, hoping that the magic of the moment would last forever.

In fact, the rest of our time together was wonderful. Although I am not sure we all fully understood what had happened, we were certainly all grateful for the change that was effected by the voice of a five-year-old child who took us to Bethlehem one Christmas Day.

### **A Foretaste of the Kingdom**

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In the mystery of the Transfiguration, we gain a foretaste of the Kingdom. A hymn of the Byzantine liturgy spells it out for us:

You were transfigured on a mountain.  
Your disciples contemplated your glory,  
Christ God,  
so that when they saw you crucified,  
they would understand  
that your passion was freely willed.  
They would announce to the world that  
you are truly the splendor of the Father.”

*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults,*  
page 80

### **Invitation to Share**

*Take a few moments of silence to reflect on one of the following questions. Then share your reflections.*

1. Share an experience in which you felt that you were taken to another time, another place.
2. Share about how you felt after the experience: about wanting to “freeze” the moment. Why do you think we feel this way?

## **BREAKING OPEN GOD'S STORY**

### **The Word of God**

*Sometime before the meeting, the leader asks a member of the group to be prepared to proclaim the passage from the Gospel according to Mark.*

#### **Mark 9:2-10**

***“This is my beloved son. Listen to him.”***

*Reader    The Gospel of the Lord.*

***All    Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.***

## **Reflect**

*Moment of silent reflection*

- What word, phrase, or image from the Scripture reading touches my heart or speaks to my life?

## **Invitation to Share**

*The leader invites those who so wish to echo a key word or phrase that touched them from the Scripture passage.*

## **Reflection**

Every year on the second Sunday of Lent, the Church sets before us the Gospel account of the transfiguration of Jesus (in Year A, from Matthew, in Year B from Mark; and in Year C from Luke). What a contrast between this Gospel and the one we heard about the temptations of Jesus on the First Sunday of Lent! The temptations highlight the humanity of Jesus, who became like us even to the point of being tempted by the devil. The transfiguration offers the disciples—and us—a glimpse of his divinity. (The first session of Season Four of *ARISE Together in Christ* will focus on the temptations of Christ.)

The text we have just heard today is from the Gospel according to Mark. The scene takes place, we are told, on Mount Tabor, suggesting we should hear an echo of God's appearance to Moses on Mount Sinai (where there was not only the mountain, but also the cloud, and the command to secrecy). Just as God's glory was revealed there to Moses, so now Jesus reveals his glory to three of his followers: Peter, James, and John. The same three disciples will be invited by Jesus to accompany him to pray in Gethsemane—the scene that marks the beginning of Jesus' passion.

Their reaction to what they witness is fascinating. Mark describes Peter as "terrified," and recounts how he seems to want to capture the moment by keeping Jesus, Moses, and Elijah there with them; he asks permission to erect three tents in the hope that

they could remain in this awesome place until the coming of the kingdom. Jesus shatters their hopes by commanding them to go down the mountain, back to reality. Jesus then instructs them to keep this experience to themselves. This is not the first time Jesus has asked this, but this time he adds “until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” What they have seen is a foretaste, that will not make sense until after the resurrection. So, too, our Lent should be lit, even if faintly, by the glow of Easter.

Two very significant figures from the Old Testament appear with Jesus. The presence of Moses and Elijah stand for the Law and the prophets, and beyond that of two promises given by God. The first is the giving of the Covenant (to Moses on Mount Sinai). The second was a promise still not realized, the coming of the “Day of the Lord.” We are clearly being invited by Mark to see how the promises of the Old Testament reach their fulfillment in Jesus.

The cloud overshadows not just Jesus but

## ***The Life of the Beloved***

As a member of a community of people with mental disabilities, I have learned a lot from people with disabilities about what it means to be the beloved. Let me start by telling you that many of the people that I live with hear voices that tell them that they are no good, that they are a problem, that they are a burden, that they are a failure. They hear a voice that keeps saying, “If you want to be loved, you had better prove that you are worth loving. You must show it.”

But what I would like to say is that the spiritual life is a life in which you gradually learn to listen to a voice that says something else, that says, “You are the beloved and on you my favor rests.”

You are the beloved and on you my favor rests. Jesus heard that voice.

I want you to hear that voice, too. It is a very important voice that says, “You are my beloved son; you are my beloved daughter. I love you with an everlasting love. I have molded you together in the depths of the earth. I have knitted you in your mother’s womb. I’ve written your name in the palm of my hand and I hold you safe in the shade of my embrace. I hold you. You belong to Me and I belong to you. You are safe where I am. Don’t be afraid. Trust that you are the beloved. That is who you truly are.”

I want you to hear that voice. It is not a very loud voice because it is an intimate voice. It comes from a very deep place. It is soft and gentle. I want you to gradually hear that voice. We both have to hear that voice and to claim for ourselves that that voice speaks the truth, our truth. It tells us who we are. That is where the spiritual life starts—by claiming the voice that calls us the beloved.

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)  
on *30 Good Minutes*,  
WTTW 11 (PBS) in Chicago

the disciples; they are not mere spectators, they are involved, drawn by God into the mystery of Christ's glorification. A voice comes from the cloud: "This is my Son, the Beloved ..." just as the voice was heard saying at Jesus' baptism. But this time the voice adds, "... listen to him." Just as the people of God had to listen to the Covenant entrusted to them through Moses, so now the new people of God must listen to Jesus, who is not just the messenger of the new Covenant but will himself be the Covenant.

As always, the Gospel invites us not just to observe the disciples, but to imagine ourselves in their place. The first reaction (theirs and ours) is: "Wow, what a magnificent experience we just had on the mountain!" "Why can't we stay here where everything is so transparent and beautiful?" But then comes the challenge: "What will happen to us if we truly 'listen to him'?" "If Jesus is the Beloved Son of God, are we not also God's Beloved?" How this Gospel account ends gives the answer.

The disciples, and then the early community, had to come to terms with the mystery that the new

### ***The Transfiguration***

The Transfiguration stands as a gateway to the saving events of the gospel, and is a mirror in which the Christian mystery is seen in its unity. Here we perceive that the living and the dead are one in Christ, that the old covenant and the new are inseparable, that the Cross and the glory are of one, that the age to come is already here, that our human nature has a destiny of glory, that in Christ the final word is uttered and in him alone the Father is well pleased. Here the diverse elements in the theology of the New Testament meet.

A. M. Ramsey

*The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*

Covenant comes at the price of Jesus' suffering and death—a fate that Peter and James, as martyrs, would share. When Mark's Gospel was first taking shape, the early Christian community was living through persecution and the constant threat of death. To them and to people today who find faith in Jesus difficult, the transfiguration is offered as a sign of the glory that belongs to the

risen Christ, the glorious outcome of the journey through death—not just for Christ but all who are called to arise together in him.



At the same time, this glimpse of glory is set in the Gospel between two predictions of Christ's suffering and death. Being a follower of Christ is not about comfort and external happiness. Those who seriously set out to follow Jesus need to expect that this will demand sacrifice—may even bring persecution and rejection. However, what we see on the mountaintop today can remain with us when we have to come down the mountain to face hard reality. It may be a lot less clear in everyday life, but nevertheless God is with us. Just as in the experience recounted in today's first reflection; long after the little child stopped singing, the peace it brought remained in the hearts of her family.

But perhaps we pass too quickly over the truth that lies at the heart of the transfiguration, as at Jesus' baptism. It is the twofold message we hear from the voice of God in the cloud.

First, that Jesus is the Beloved Son of God. Baptism and transfiguration, in Christ, are also ours. We too, are beloved sons and daughters of God. God sees and loves in us what God sees and loves in Christ. Love is our origin; love is our constant calling; love is our fulfillment in heaven. How many of us believe that we are the Beloved of God? It can be so hard in today's society to believe in our "Belovedness" when so many other voices are shouting: "You are no good; you'll never amount to anything; you're too heavy or too skinny; God could never forgive you ..."

Second, we are told to "listen to him." Transfiguration was the overflow of his intimate connection with God, a relationship based on love and nurtured in prayer. This is a relationship that we are invited to share; it began with our baptism, but it needs to be sustained every day of our lives until it is fulfilled. This is the lifelong process of "conversion" that we began exploring in Session One. What are we moving toward in "conversion"? Our transfiguration! For us, as for Christ, that depends on nurturing our relationship with God as his "Beloved." How? By listening to Christ.



“To listen to him in his Word, contained in Sacred Scripture; to listen to him in the events of our lives, seeking to decipher in them the messages of Providence. Finally to listen to him in our brothers and sisters, especially in the lowly and the poor” (Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Message, Second Sunday of Lent 2006).

## **Invitation to Share**

*Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the following questions. Then share your reflections.*

1. What prevents people from believing in God’s unconditional love for them?
2. What am I afraid of if I come down “the mountain”? Too much work? A change of life? People’s expectations of me as a Christian?
3. The voice from the cloud tells us “Listen to him.” In what ways, personally and as a community, could we be better listeners to Christ?

## **INVITATION TO ACT**

*Sharing and being together in a small Christian community fosters growth in our faith and in our spirituality. But no communal sharing is complete without a serious commitment to putting our faith into practice.*

In this session we have reflected on Jesus’ transfiguration and on the reaction of his three friends. God’s words echo in our heart: “This is my Beloved Son; listen to him”: to what kind of action does this inspire us?

*Some Suggestions*

1. Pray with the Scriptures for 20 minutes each day. You may want to use some of the passages on page 33. When you pray with these or any other readings pay attention to a word that touches your heart. Listen to that word. Let the message both console you and prompt you to action.
2. Tell someone this week that God loves him or her unconditionally. (For example, as you put your children to bed and say "Goodnight," add simply "God loves you!")
3. We believe that life changes for us with baptism, when we were marked with the sign of the cross and claimed for Christ. This week, begin and end your day by making the sign of the cross, in remembrance of and thanksgiving for your baptism.
4. Your parish may have candidates who will be baptized, confirmed and receive First Eucharist at the Easter Vigil; pray for them by name as they prepare to make this new beginning in life.

## ***Listening to Christ in Scripture***

“Come to me, all you that are weary  
and carrying heavy burdens,  
and I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;  
for I am gentle and humble in heart,  
and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

*Matthew 11:28-30 [NRSV]*

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths  
for his name’s sake.  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.”

*Psalms 23 [NRSV]*

“I am the good shepherd.  
I know my own and my own know me,  
just as the Father knows me  
and I know the Father.”

*John 10:14-15 [NRSV]*

**Closing Prayer**

*Leader* O God, who have commanded us  
to listen to your beloved Son,  
be pleased, we pray,  
to nourish us inwardly by your word,  
that, with spiritual sight made pure,  
we may rejoice to behold your glory.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

*All* Amen.

(Collect, Second Sunday of Lent, *Roman Missal*)

**Suggested Song**

**Eye Has Not Seen**

**Looking Ahead**

*Prepare for the next faith-sharing meeting by reading over Session Three.*

*In particular:*

- *read the “Focus for this Session” (on page 34).*
- *read the Gospel passage: **John 4:5-42***
- *It would help you set this passage in context if you were to begin reading from verse 1 (Jesus passing through Samaria). This is a very dramatic Gospel. This will be more apparent if the proclamation at the next session is in three voices: narrator, the voice of the Samaritan Woman, and the voice of Jesus. Delegate members of the group to prepare the reading in this way.*
- *Water is central to the theme of next week’s session. If possible, the faith sharing should take place around a large bowl of water. Even if this is not possible for the reflection and sharing, it will be needed for the closing prayer.*

