

Luke 9:28-43

²⁸Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" ³⁶When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

³⁷On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." ⁴¹Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." ⁴²While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

⁴³And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

As I prepared for today, my heart, mind and spirit went back and forth and up and down on this roller coaster ride of emotions. This week has been hard as I learned of the death of the older brother of one of my son's friends and classmates. I learned of a friend and colleague who I love dearly diagnosed with an incurable disease which will cause him to leave this world much too soon. I watched videos and news stories of people fleeing their homes and trying to survive as terror reigns down on them. I read comments of friends with children who are trying to figure out who they are, learning they are being threatened for supporting those children. I have listened to friends whose parents are dying. Friends whose marriages are ending. Children who find themselves in the midst of uncertainty surrounding divorce and moving and new schools. I have talked with people this week who are struggling to buy groceries for their children, whose checking accounts are overdrawn and credit cards maxed out as they struggle to buy the basic necessities. I have listened to people tell the stories of the unhoused here in St. Louis who are freezing to death because there is a lack of shelter in this city. I have listened to and encouraged those who fight their demons of anxiety, depression, addiction, loneliness, and despair. I watch, I listen, I hear the cries of the people and I carry them, all of them, in my heart and my soul feels heavy and I wonder why this is happening? We are good people, faithful people, right? We believe that all things are possible with the help of God, right? We should be able to help, right? This kind of thing shouldn't be happening in 2022, right? Then why does it all seem to be weighing us down, as if we are the disciples on that mountain who are weighed down with sleep?

I return to the text for today, this thought of transfiguration and I scratch my head and I wonder about this mysterious God who works and moves in ways we may not be seeing, because while our heads are in the cloud, we are not paying attention to the message. And suddenly I feel as if my own eyes are opened and I begin to see this idea of transfiguration and the importance of the story that follows the mountain top experience through a whole new light, one shrouded in mystery and hope and I find my soul beginning to settle into a peace that can only be found in the arms of God.

What is transfiguration anyway? How do we explain it? In Harry Potter, the students must take a class on transfiguration. In this class they learn to turn objects, even people, into something else. When Harry and his friend Ron are running late for class, Professor McGonagall, who teaches the class, played by the brilliant Maggie Smith, she says to Ron, "Perhaps it would be more useful if I were to transfigure Mr. Potter and yourself into a pocket watch?" In this class you could change the entire appearance of something to become something different. While there is no magic spell in the bible to make someone or something transfigure, it does feel somewhat magical and mysterious. This changing of appearance. The Greek word used here is metamorphothe. When we hear metamorphosis and we tend to think of

caterpillars and butterflies. During the shutdown my daughter, Liliann, was in her last half of kindergarten. One of the things her kindergarten teacher was known for was ordering caterpillars and having the children observe them as they changed into butterflies. Then, on the last day of school, they would release them. Well, since Liliann didn't get to do that, I ordered the caterpillars. Since I ordered them late, we learned that they would be ready to release around her birthday. We watched the caterpillars as they ate and as they grew. Eventually they make their way to the top of this cup they come in and they begin to make their cocoons. Once the cocoons are made, you carefully take the lid and place it inside the pop up butterfly garden. Every morning, Liliann would wake up and run downstairs to see if she had butterflies. It took time, but eventually she woke up to find one butterfly. Later that day there was another. The next morning another butterfly. The last butterfly took its sweet time. We were getting worried, but eventually it was there too. We had 4 butterflies who would be ready to release just in time for her small outdoor party we had with a couple of friends in our backyard. When we released the butterflies, they stuck to her dress as if to wish her a happy birthday and give her kisses, before spreading their wings and flying away. It was bittersweet as we had come to love the butterflies, but it was beautiful to watch their metamorphosis take place and watching them come into their own as they took flight.

Those caterpillars were transfigured. Their appearance was something different and new and beautiful as they became what they were meant to be.

And so Jesus, after having been baptized and healing people and calling disciples and preaching and feeding the 5,000 and calming the roaring sea, and reminding the people to let their light shine, and having asked the disciples who people say that he is and having Peter declare that he is the Messiah, decides to take three: Peter, James and John, up the mountain where he can recharge his batteries. Jesus is there praying. He is tired. The disciples are exhausted. And suddenly this thing happens. Something that can only be described as a, "Mountain Experience" that invokes both fear and awe.

Suddenly Jesus does not look like Jesus. It's as if he has gone through some sort of metamorphosis. He is transfigured. He is the same on the inside, but his outward appearance is something different...something new. And then, like a scene from Star Wars, standing beside him are Moses and Elijah. Jesus stands with those who have come before him. Can you imagine witnessing such an event? And then, it says they were overshadowed. The disciples were overshadowed by this cloud. Luke has one other place where it mentions someone being overshadowed. When Mary learns she is going to give birth to the Son of God, the angel tells her she will be overshadowed by the Most High. For me, that imagery is frightening. Have you have had

someone or something larger than you tower over you? It can feel threatening. It can feel intimidating. It can make you feel very weak and small. And so it says that the disciples were terrified. Here they are, heads stuck in the cloud that has come over them and suddenly this voice says, "This is my son. LISTEN TO HIM!"

As they come back down the mountain a man is looking for Jesus. His son is afflicted with seizures. I struggle, in our modern world, to say that this child was possessed by a spirit, mostly because I had epileptic seizures growing up. I don't like to think of myself as having been possessed. My parents may have disagreed, but nonetheless, this child is suffering, he is overshadowed by these seizures and the father is overshadowed with the grief that comes from watching your child suffer. He says to Jesus that he asked the disciples to heal him, but they could not. Jesus becomes irritated with the disciples because once again their lack of understanding and faith is showing and he heals the child. The disciples cannot seem to get it together. They cannot seem to understand the enormity of what is happening. Do they have faith in Jesus? I believe they do, but I believe they are misunderstanding that having faith in Jesus is just one part of living into being who they are called to be. In order to bring about healing and wholeness and grace and love and in order to let their light shine, they have to get their heads out of the clouds, stop living in fear, and have faith in themselves. Only then can they let their light shine and help those who are overshadowed by their own demons, whatever those demons may be: food insecurity, homelessness, abuse, war, learning disabilities, illness...the list goes on and on...

The world is overshadowed and people are terrified. And yet while we stand there with our heads in the cloud, a voice is calling out to us saying, "This is my son. LISTEN TO HIM!" Get your head out of the clouds and pay attention. Believe in what he is saying, do what he is saying. Believe in yourself. Why? Because when you pay attention, great things can happen. Amazing things can happen. The world can change. People can heal. But first you have to pay attention and believe you have the power within you to make things better. And the good thing is, you're not alone. You have the faith and love of those who came before you to guide you along the way. You have one another to lean on and to lift you up. You have the ability and the power to change this world. To bring peace. To share love and grace. You have the power to transfigure this world for the better. Pay attention, believe and let your light shine. Listen to Jesus. We are his followers, therefore we must work together to transform this world into a place of knowing and understanding that God's grace is for all people and we must help to heal the world of the things that overshadow it and its people.

I have hope. I hope that people will do better and be better. I have hope that the people of the world can and will heal. Maybe that's not

realistic. I have been asked why on earth I am so filled with hope, that this stuff has nothing to do with me, but I am called to listen, to work and to believe that it can and will be better. First I have to walk with Christ, and believe in the abilities the Holy Spirit has given to me. I have to believe in myself and realize that I am not alone, but I walk with a multitude of others those who came before me and those who are here now, and together we can make change happen.

I leave you now with a poem from Ann Weems.

"I No Longer Pray For Peace"

By Ann Weems

On the edge of war, one foot already in,

I no longer pray for peace:

I pray for miracles.

I pray that stone hearts will turn

to tenderheartedness,

and evil intentions will turn

to mercifulness,

and all the soldiers already deployed

will be snatched out of harm's way,

and the whole world will be

astounded onto its knees.

I pray that all the "God talk"

will take bones,

and stand up and shed

its cloak of faithlessness,

and walk again in its powerful truth.

I pray that the whole world might

sit down together and share

its bread and its wine.

Some say there is no hope,

but then I've always applauded the holy fools

who never seem to give up on

the scandalousness of our faith:

that we are loved by God.....

that we can truly love one another.

I no longer pray for peace:

I pray for miracles.

- Poem by Ann Weems