

Title: What is Revealed

Date: 2/11/2024 (Transfiguration, Year B)

Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Service: 10 am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)

Readings: [2 Kings 2:1-12](#); [2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#); [Mark 9:2-9](#); [Psalm 50:1-6](#)

Audio Link: <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/st-albans-austin/episodes/Transfiguration-What-is-Revealed-e2fmk7v>

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/jSoaKeWAdIU?t=1442>

The God of gods has spoken;  
God has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.  
Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty,  
God is revealed in glory.  
O God, you will come and will not keep silence;  
before you there is a consuming flame,  
and round about you a raging storm (Ps 50:1-3, St Helena Psalter).

Since early January, we've been in the Season of Epiphany. One way to approach the readings assigned to us for Epiphany is follow the spotlight and see what they're revealing to us about Jesus and his ministry. Since today marks the conclusion of this season focused on revelations, let's refresh our memories on what we know so far.

At Jesus' baptism, we saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove. We heard a voice coming from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:10-11).

Jesus is revealed to be the Son of God. God loves him and is pleased with him simply because of who he is. God loves him and is pleased with where he has placed himself, in the company of John the Baptist, by the River Jordan. He probably could've made a decent living as a craftsman, but he chose to go into the other family business.

At Galilee, Jesus promised Philip and Nathanael that if they follow him, they will see great things. "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:50-51).

Jesus is revealed to be the Son of Man, the one promised in the vision of the prophet Daniel. This is the one who "was given authority, glory and sovereign power...His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14). His coming is a sign that the way things are, the way the world has been operating, is coming to an end. He will be a king and establish a kingdom. But spoiler alert, it's not the kind of kingdom most people expected.

Then after John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus began to proclaim the good news of God. He also began recruiting disciples. He said to Simon and his brother Andrew, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people" (Mark 1:14-17).

Jesus is revealed as the one who will walk the road that John has prepared. Jesus doesn't look for his disciples among the scribes, but among the fishermen. He shows them the connection between their current job and the work he's inviting them into. The experience and skills and attitude they cultivated as fishermen will translate well to fishing for people. There is no one right or perfect starting point for our spiritual journey.

Then he and disciples went to Capernaum, where he taught as one having authority and cast out unclean spirits. By that evening, the whole city gathered at the door, and he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.

Healing stories are tricky to talk about nowadays, because we are (hopefully) better at recognizing that a person who is deaf or using a walker or is neuro-spicy doesn't need to be fixed. They can be whole without conforming to a certain "norm."

That the **whole city** is at the door reveals that even as these people might have thought they were the exception, the outlier, that was actually the "norm." But they didn't know that until Jesus gives them permission to be open about all the ways they felt out of place.

So, healing stories are less about health and more about restoring relationships. Jesus shows them the way by touching those who are considered unclean, by performing a resurrection of sorts by lifting them up. Jesus is revealed as the one who removes the obstacles that keep us from embracing ourselves and one another as part of this very imperfect and very human community.

The next morning, he went to a deserted place and prayed. When the disciples found him, he told them it was time to move on. Then he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

This reveals that in Jesus' ministry, words and actions go together. He proclaims the good news and calls for repentance AND he casts out demons. Likewise, we pray through our thoughts and our speech AND also with our hands and feet. When we confess, we confess the sins we've committed through thought, word, and deed. It's all connected.

What does all this have to do with today's gospel?

For one thing, the Transfiguration is the pinnacle of all these revelations about Jesus. Not only does it happen on a literal mountain top, not only is he wearing an impossibly clean and dazzling garment, Moses and Elijah appear beside him. Peter and James and John see him in conversation with these living(?) embodiments of Law and Prophecy. He is shown to be the continuation of these two traditions and the covenants, the promises made between God and God's people. God reveals the identity of Jesus, underlines it and writes it in big bold capital letters by proclaiming. "This is my son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Can God be any more obvious?

For another thing, this takes place roughly halfway through the Gospel according to Mark. Chapters One to Eight have been building up toward this revelation on the mountain top, and Chapters Nine to Sixteen will take us down the mountain and toward the cross and the tomb, toward death and resurrection.

At this point, it's tempting to start talking about Lent. It's hard to stand at the edge of the mountain top without looking down over the edge. Next week, we'll be in the wilderness, but **today** we are still on the top of that mountain. We are looking at Jesus, revealed in full glory.

Peter is also looking at Jesus, standing beside Moses and Elijah. Overwhelmed by terror, he offers to make them three dwellings. Maybe he wants to build a memorial to mark this encounter, maybe he wants to entice them to stay. Six days before going up the mountain, Jesus had begun to teach the disciples that the Son of Man will undergo great suffering. He revealed that he will be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

So, Peter knows, but he doesn't **really know**. The first time he hears Jesus say all this, he actually rebukes Jesus; he scolds him in front of the other disciples. He doesn't want to believe that this is how things will turn out. He wants the veil that Paul writes about. He wants the gospel, the good news, but only in a way that's comforting and comfortable. So, when I hear that Peter's response to being terrified is to suggest building these three dwellings, I wonder if he wants to stop the story right here... if he wants to stay in that moment when everything seems perfectly bright and perfectly right. Tempting, isn't it?

Then a cloud overshadows them. As the Psalm reminds us, God will show up, and God will not stay silent. God breaks into this moment as a voice from the clouds, "This is my son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

When we listen to Jesus, our reactions tell us something about ourselves. When we **really** listen, it reveals the veil we have put up between us and the good news. It shows us in which areas we are following the god of the world instead of the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness." It shows us the ways in which we have made God in our image instead of ourselves in the image of God. Have we transfigured God or are we being transfigured by God? For example, it doesn't make sense to me that some people among the convoy rallying around the southern border this weekend would call themselves God's Army. It bothers me that they believe they're fighting a "spiritual battle" for the soul of America.<sup>1</sup>

God led the people of Israel through the wilderness as they looked for a better life in the promise land. God led Joseph's brothers to Egypt in times of famine, and the angels of God prompted Joseph, Mary's husband, to flee to Egypt when Herod ordered the murder of newborns. Contrary to what they think, Christians have not replaced people of Israel in the eyes of God, nor is America the new Jerusalem.

Commentators who write about today's passage in Second Corinthians point out that Paul is writing against other people who are preaching the gospel in Corinth. According to Dr. Ronald J. Allen, these so-called "superapostles" preached a gospel of glory without suffering.

"They likely believed that the present possession of the Spirit with dramatic ecstatic experience and esoteric visions meant that believers would not have to undergo suffering but would receive the fullness of God's purposes through a series of ups, ups, ups, and upper ups."<sup>2</sup>

They thought that following Jesus looks like staying on the mountain top. In their eyes, God's purpose was to "create a spiritual experience that allowed one to feel good within oneself...[they] provided an escape from the present social setting, whereas Paul's gospel envisioned the transformation of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Looking toward the example of Jesus, Paul encourages us to wrestle with our discomfort with the status quo, with poverty and captivity and brokenness. "To declare Jesus as Lord is for Paul to interpret the death and resurrection of Jesus as a paradigm for how this transformation will take place: an age of suffering (the cross) followed by a new world (resurrection)."<sup>4</sup>

For better or worse, to declare Jesus as Lord means staying humble, looking for our blindspots, for the veils that keep us takes us away from Jesus, from his fulfillment of the good news. Listening to Jesus will take us out and about, doing things that can be new to us or hard for us, whether it's talking to people or building bridges. Following Jesus doesn't look like getting somewhere and stopping there. We can't live our whole lives up on top of a mountain. I mean, we can, but that means we aren't really listening. Following Jesus looks like always being on the move, yet always facing the one who is pointing us toward God, always looking and listening.

Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3akejv/gods-army-convoy-take-back-our-border-far-right-maga-groups>

<sup>2</sup> Ronald J. Allen, "[Theological Perspective on 2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#)," in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 448.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald J. Allen, "[Theological Perspective on 2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#)," in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 450.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald J. Allen, "[Theological Perspective on 2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#)," in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 446.