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The Feast of the Transfiguration, Luke 9:28-36

After These Things

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

Jesus has healed, Jesus has fed, Jesus has said, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Eugene Peterson paraphrases the next part of “these sayings” from Jesus like so “Then he told them what they could expect for themselves: “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat—I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, *my way*, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?”¹

After these things, Jesus went on a mountain to pray and took Peter, James, and John with him. While he prayed, Jesus’ face changed and his clothes became bright white. All of a sudden, Moses and Elijah, symbols of the law and the prophets. Jesus, like Moses told the water to move and fed thousands in the wilderness. Jesus, like the prophets Elijah and Elisha, increased bread, healed lepers, and raised the dead. Together, they talked about Jesus’ exodus² that he was about to complete in Jerusalem, the center of power. Peter, James, and John witnessed this conversation and just as Moses and Elijah were heading back to heaven, Peter in his enthusiasm and wonder said, “Please, stay; let’s make this more than a memory; let’s make places for all three of you to stay here, like this.”

In the thickness of a cloud and the closeness of God’s presence, a voice said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; *listen to him!*’³ When 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. At Jesus’ baptism, the voice had spoken through the heavens to say “you are my Son, my beloved” and now the same voice speaks to say to Peter, James, and John “*This is my Son; listen to him!*”

The moment is so otherworldly that they look, but do not necessarily listen. They forget what Jesus said before they came up on this mountain to pray—that conscious, unglorious rejection is something he had to face. And then, Moses and Elijah gathered with Jesus to talk of his exodus, to talk of his suffering and departure in the midst of the

¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+9&version=MSG>

² The word translated “departure” in the NRSV is the Greek word *exodos* or “exodus.” Robert Jensen’s hallmark naming of God from his systematic theology goes like this, “**God** is whoever **raised Jesus** from the dead, having before **raised Israel** from Egypt.”

(<https://iheartbarth.wordpress.com/2014/03/16/god-in-the-grave-robert-jenson/>)

³ Luke’s account of Jesus Baptism in Luke 3:21-22 “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” is directed to Jesus. In Luke 9, the words are directed to Peter, James, and John, and the voice also says, “Listen to him!”

powers of temple and state. Israel was raised from Egypt to the Promised Land. Israel had an exodus and so will Jesus. Jesus will be raised from death to new life, leading all to the Kingdom of God, available on both sides of the grave.

Jesus' appearance was changed, and Peter, James, and John were transfigured, too. This mountain top experience formed them-how they saw Jesus and then how they saw their own lives. This wasn't simply the best rabbi in town; no, the Son of God was their teacher and as his students, as his followers, they knew themselves to be known as agents of change for the world. No respectable self-help program here, no five step plan, no man of the year. Rather a movement from God through God incarnate for God's cosmos.

This is what the children who participated in Vacation Bible School this past week encountered. They had a mountain top experience where they saw adults and youth change their appearance and the appearance of this building so that they could find themselves changed for good, for God, for changed hearts and minds. They had an intense clear experience of being covered in the love of God.

Mountain top experiences, for people of all ages, are not meant to be an end, but a defining moment among many on their journey with God and neighbor. One that hearkens back to their baptism and one that fuels them forward to the next missional moment of doing good and seeking peace at school, at home, in our workplaces. We can be tempted to stay on the mountain, to remain hidden in sacred space and institutional safety.

Thankfully, God speaks from the cloud to remind disciples that mountain-top moments are moments, not the journey. God needs us to walk down the mountain and share some of that love with those on the margins below. The mission of God does not depend on buildings. God's people are on a mission, with Jesus leading the way, up and down mountains, in places high and low and in between. God's plan for his followers, for us, is more than any dwelling place for worship. God's plan is one of transfiguration, transformation of lives.

I know many of you gathered here today drove a long way to get here this morning and passed many other houses of worship on your way here. My guess is that what keeps you coming back is not the building but the people of God who gather and the ways in which you find yourself both encouraged and challenged, too. My hope is that we might not forget that this congregation began off the hill, in a closed down bar in Manchaca, and talked about faith and science as complementary in the 1980's. We are not people who stay on the mountain. We are not people who tear each other down. That is not who we are in Jesus. In Jesus, we are beloved, you are beloved, the world is beloved.

So here's to another mountain top experience of clarity of God's love. Here's to the change that emerges and shows itself in service in our daily worlds. Here's to us being transfigured, not just Jesus. *Amen.*