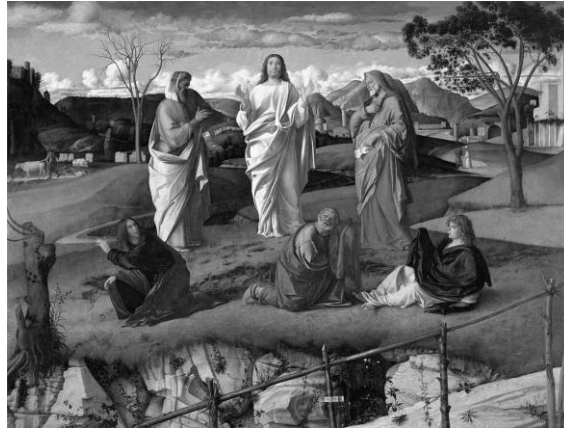


ENCOUNTERING TRANSFIGURATION



Scripture:

Psalm 99

¹The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! ²The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. ³Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he! ⁴Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. ⁵Extol the LORD our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!

⁶Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called on his name. They cried to the LORD, and he answered them. ⁷He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees, and the statutes that he gave them.

⁸O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. ⁹Extol the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy.

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.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



ENCOUNTERING TRANSFIGURATION

Do you ever wonder what significance there might be that Transfiguration Sunday is always the Sunday before Lent? Or am I the only one who ponders these things?

This week's reading from Luke's Gospel describes one of the most mysterious events in the life of Jesus Christ: the moment when, high up on top of a mountain, Jesus is transfigured in front of Peter, James, and John. Jesus' appearance dramatically changes, his clothes becoming dazzling white, whiter than anyone could bleach them. His face shines brightly, and Elijah and Moses appear with him, the two greatest prophets in all of Israel's history!

PETER, JAMES AND JOHN

Jesus was transfigured in the sight of his three disciples, Peter, James, and John who are given a glimpse of his divine reality. They see a vision of Christ's godliness and holiness. These happen to be the three who will be with him in the garden of Gethsemane when he prays before being arrested and crucified in a few days.

These three specially appointed disciples get to witness Jesus being purified, sanctified, and then glorified by God in the presence of Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop.

HEALER

Jesus descends from the mountaintop experience and immediately heals a boy possessed by a seizure-inducing demon. Could this be to remind his disciples that despite his obvious power and anointing from God, healing is his main message and ministry?

Jesus descends from the mountain shining brightly as the supreme Messiah. Christ's healing force was reinforced on the mountain after he met with Moses and Elijah to prepare for his last weeks on earth. Clearly, on this mountain, Jesus was strengthened and purified and prepared for whatever was about to happen next in his short ministry on earth.

But what else happened up there? Biblical scholars believe this story was meant to communicate the message that Moses stands for the Law, Elijah stands for the prophets, and that Jesus was and is the Messiah.

LISTEN TO HIM!

By singling Jesus out as "my Son, the Beloved," God sets the gospel over the law

and the prophets. Listen to *him*, says the voice from the cloud. That is the message from God for us all. We are to listen to him!

PUT OURSELVES IN PETER'S PLACE

Theologian Reverend Barbara Brown Taylor encourages us to put ourselves in Peter's place up on the mountain and see and feel it from his perspective when a voice from the cloud lifts the hairs on the back of his neck. Ever had that feeling?

She says, "You feel fear so fast and primitive, you're bristling like a dog as you wonder, what's the voice saying? Not "listen to *me*" but "listen to *him*." The Son, the Beloved. But, Peter wonders, listen to *what*? He's not saying anything. He's shining. Or at least he was. Now he's not. Now it's over. Now what?

If anything even remotely that strange has ever happened to you, then you know why Peter, James and John were relieved when Jesus told them later to keep quiet about what had happened. Supernatural light. Famous people who came back from the dead. God from inside a cloud. Things like that may happen in the Bible, but try talking about them now and someone's going to give you the name of a good psychiatrist.

THE WORD SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

Have you ever had such an experience where you questioned your sanity or your understanding of God? When cures and healing are beyond our powers, when the shine on a loved one's face comes from tears in the fluorescent lights of intensive care, it is good to listen to the voice that urges us to follow on and not give up, for the Word shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Bible is a book of encounters that are transfiguring, in which a long parade of

people run into God, each other, *life*--and are never the same again." Rev. Taylor says that not only do we meet in the Bible terrifying clouds and hair-raising voices but we also meet crazy prophets, persistent infertility, armed enemies, and deep depression, along with life-saving strangers, miraculous children, food in the wilderness, and knee-wobbling love.

Barbara Brown Taylor goes on to say, "Whether such biblical encounters come disguised as "good" or "bad," they have a way of breaking biblical people open, of rearranging what they think they know for sure so that there is room for more divine movement in their lives. Sometimes the movement involves traveling from one place to another. Sometimes it means changing their angle on what is true and why. Sometimes it involves the almost invisible movement of one heart toward another.

This encounter on the mountain reminds us that faith has more to do "with staying fully present to what is happening right in front of you than with being certain of what it all means. The *meeting* -- *that's the thing.*"

JADEN

A six year old boy can be powerful example of one heart towards another and meeting people in God-like encounters. After both his parents died, little Jaden decided to deal with his grief by making 33,000 people smile.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/georgia-orphans-mission-make-others-smile/>

(The video shows this little boy giving away little yellow duckies to strangers and seeing their happy reactions. This is a powerful example of healing by helping others.)

So let's do all we can to Meet God in these upcoming weeks in Lent. Life often seems uncertain. So - Let's meet God through examining certainties and uncertainties within the relationship between faith in God and Science. One of the topics will be The Science of Happiness that little Jaden has all figured out. Happiness often comes from making others happy.

No one can make you go and encounter something new about God. But if you've been looking for some excuse to head to your own mountaintop and pray, Lent is a good season to do just that. If you've been looking for some way to trade in your old certainties for a new movement in your life, look no further. This is your chance to enter the "cloud of unknowing" and listen for whatever it is that God has to say to you and to us.. Lent is your chance to encounter God deeper and in a new way.

My hope for you is that you will encounter God's contagious glory this Lenten and Easter season in the people and in the circumstances you experience. They may not all be mountaintop experiences with God speaking to you within a cloud, but you never know!!

Maybe you will find a new way to look at your life and encounter God through a new perspective on how God is working in and through your life. Maybe Lent and Easter will bring you a new way of worshipping and glorifying God that expands your understanding of how to demonstrate your love for God and for others in your life.

God's contagious glory will transfigure you if you allow it to. Let us open ourselves up to encounter God in new ways this season and be less certain of what we already know about God and more open to what we have yet to learn and encounter. Amen.

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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