

Everyday Transfigurations

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Luke 9:28-36

This is a transitional moment, kind of. The people who laid out the liturgical year place the biblical event of the Transfiguration here. Preachers don't always know what to do with the Transfiguration. Sometimes we emphasize it. Sometimes we avoid it. Sometimes we talk around it. It is a biblical event that defies description for us, in the course of many biblical events that do.

Jesus takes three of his disciples up on a mountain to pray. And while he was praying, something happened. It is called "transfiguration," literally a change of form or a change of appearance. We want to know what happened – something did. As things were transfiguring, two figures, identified as Moses and Elijah, appeared. They were talking. The disciples were tired, but they were taking this all in. Peter suggests to Jesus that since this is so extraordinary, they should build three buildings, one each for Jesus and Elijah and Moses. Then a cloud came over them and a voice boomed about – this is my son, the chosen. Listen to him. Then it was over, just like that. And they did not tell anybody about it.

Interpretations fall into clusters. Some will spend time thinking about going up to the mountain to pray, and Jesus' need, and our need, to get away for spiritual reflection. That is a good reminder at the outset of Lent. Some will spend time connecting the figures of Jesus with Elijah and Moses. Moses represents the law and Elijah the prophets – are we being told how they go hand in hand, with Jesus as the culmination of both, bringing both together? Some interpretations will spend time thinking about the disciples' responses, first tired, then the suggestion that three buildings be built, kind of like shrines, to capture this. It is an absurd suggestion, and therefore most human. Some interpretations focus on the moment when the cloud rolls in and the voice booms out. Something similar happened in the baptism of Jesus, that same voice booming out and identifying him – the Bible's ongoing efforts to help us understand who this Jesus is, sometimes subtly, sometimes not so much. This is one of those moments when subtlety is NOT the strategy. This is my son. The chosen. Get it? Pay attention to him! Get it? And then, like that, it is over, and we are back to our everyday lives. That is, this time, what resonates to me the most. Everyday transfigurations. Those moments, each day, when we return to the valley from the mountaintop, when we encounter the holy, when we encounter Jesus, when a mundane moment is transfigured, transformed, into a holy one, and even ever so briefly we hear that voice that identifies what is going on. And if we are fortunate, or blessed, even, we recognize it for what it is and even without understanding it, are grateful for it.

Frederick Buechner, the great writer of things of faith, suggests what this can look like. "The face of a man walking with his child in the park, of a woman baking bread, of sometimes even the unlikeliest person listening to a concert, say, or standing barefoot in the sand watching the waves roll in. . . . Every once and so often," Buechner says, "something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that it's almost beyond bearing."

I hope you have had those moments. I have. They will be different for each of us, though I believe they happen in community as well. Perhaps last week you noticed how glorious the moon was, huge and bright in the crisp January air. I pulled to the side of the road while driving and just gazed at it, for 30 seconds, for a minute. I believe the everyday transfigurations happen when we stop – our version of going up on a mountain – and notice. Notice the vastness. The quiet. The indescribable beauty.

Or it happens at the end points of the journey of life, beginnings and endings. We visited a baby, a newborn in the congregation, this week. And to hold the baby, and look into her eyes, so much comes together at that point. The miracle of birth, which, despite every advance in medical science and technology, still is more a mystery than anything else. The great unknown of this young one's life and how it will unfold. You cannot be anything but blown away, transfigured, at the moment by everything that had happened to allow all of this to happen.

Or sitting in a hospice with a church member, whose days, if not hours and minutes are numbered. A life lived well, fully, completely, if not perfectly, faithfully. And again, despite every advance in medical science and technology, still more a mystery than anything else.

Perhaps you whisper a few words, utter the Lord's Prayer or the 23rd Psalm. But mostly what you do is sit, holding a hand, taking in the awesome-ness of it all, the power of it all, transfigured, humbled and awed, by the sheer interplay of gratitude and grief, by life's power and fragility. It does happen in worship for me. Perhaps for you. Perhaps not. Many times it happens in the intersection of music and community in worship. Last October in Kenya, in what we would call praise music, music that in this country is played primarily in churches other than ours, but that in the Kenyan context spoke to my soul. We found ourselves clapping, even swaying a bit, joyful, grateful, transfigured.

Or this morning. Communion. The Lord's Supper. That moment when you encounter Jesus in bread broken and cup poured out. Sometimes the intimacy strikes me. Sometimes the vastness. Sometimes I am mindful of all those around me, all of you and those who have gone before us and those doing this same thing in other places. Sometimes it is just Jesus and me.

Communion is by intinction this morning, a growing change for us. People tell me that they

experience things differently whether we move forward or remain in our pews. That's probably good, those varied responses. Pay attention to that this morning, what your experience is, how you encounter Jesus, how you encounter community, what your transfiguration moment may be as you, and we together, approach this table.

I do not mean to provide a laundry list of everyday transfiguration moments. I only mean to suggest, with Buechner and others who have gone before us, that these moments happen, and are available to us. We cannot schedule them or predict them. Some will be subtle and nuanced and that might frustrate us. Some will smack us up 'side our emotional or spiritual head, and we might not know what to do. Like the disciples, we will not always know how to receive or interpret.

Alyce McKenzie writes: "God promises us that through Scripture we will meet God, and our identities as individuals and a community of faith will be formed and transformed."

I believe that, that whether this happens on the mountaintop or in the valley below, it happens. Our task, our gift, is to experience, to receive, and invite others to do the same, and to be grateful. Amen.