

“Listen to Him”
Transfiguration – March 3, 2019 – Luke 28-36/C

Poor Transfiguration. No one gives this festival any love! It’s not like Christmas or Easter. Mention those, and folks light up, because they “get it.” But try dropping the word, *transfiguration*, into conversation...nothing but blank stares. Sort of like Peter, James and John had. Years ago, someone asked my pastor spouse, “How did the disciples know who the guys with Jesus were? I mean, there was no Facebook or way to transmit images from generation to generation in that time. So how did they know it was Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus? By husband’s response? **“Nametags.”**

Today’s story is different than teaching stories we often hear. Instead, it shares an image that helps support our symbols. It does what a nametag does – identifies who the wearer is. Imagine what the disciples were experiencing on that day. It had been a long three years of ministry behind them at this point. The glory days of healings and exorcisms, miracles and wonders had been great, but now the talk had switched to taking up crosses, losing their lives. And Jesus had just predicted his own death...and there was nothing they could do about it!

They were run down, confused, tired beyond what they could imagine when Jesus took them up the mountain – to pray – to rest – to have some time apart while Jesus spent time with his Father in prayer. Even as they fought off sleep, the three could see Jesus was not alone. Not only was Jesus glowing – he was talking with Moses and Elijah! And if it hadn’t been for the writer of Luke, we would never been privy to the conversation: Jesus, Moses and Elijah are speaking of Jesus’ “departure,” out of Jerusalem. The word they used for departure was **EXODUS**.

Ex-odos, literally *odos*, which means **the way** and *ex* which means **out**. Thus, exodus means “the way out,” **Exodus** - it reminds me of a classic rock song by the Animals called, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*. But for the disciples, the **word** Exodus was a symbol by itself: The Exodus was the escape from slavery in Egypt and the salvation of the people of Israel through Red Sea. Think of it as the seminal event for the Jewish people. In the same way, Christians point to the cross as a symbol of salvation for followers of Jesus, the Christ. At the time, the disciples didn’t know it would be their nametag. (They couldn’t know...) But the time was coming when they would understand fully.

That’s what Jesus, Moses and Elijah were talking about...how Jesus was gonna get outta this place. After all, his birth had been unorthodox; now what about his death? But, why these two counselors? Why not the biggest heroes of their history, like Abraham and King David? Scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests that Moses and Elijah had both had unusual exits as their ways out, which made them the likely agents for Mission Transfiguration:

Moses died at edge of Promised Land-God buried him (Deuteronomy 34)

Elijah, of course, never actually dies, but rode into heaven on a chariot of fire.

Jesus’ way out would be the most unorthodox imagined for the Son of God: crucifixion. Strange to think that for 30 years, Jesus’ divinity had been captive to, bound in flesh; yet now it was time to fulfill the Scripture and finally **follow the way out**. Strange that all this talk of death was wrapped up in glory. Almost as strange as our salvation came through a cross.

Transfiguration is the fulfillment of the Season of Epiphany (the revelation of God through Jesus.) It is the bridge from Christmas to Lent – bracketed by two white festivals, The Baptism of Our Lord and the Day of Transfiguration: Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (standing in for all the Prophets) Together they symbolize the Law and the Prophets, or the whole

of the Hebrew Bible. At the center, Jesus, who fulfilled Scripture by becoming the New Testament, the New Covenant with God.

There is a mysterious side to the ways of God. Where **we** focus on the glorious light; a dazzling God - this story imagines God wrapped in an enveloping cloud. Where **we** are drawn to the "mountain top" experience; the subject on this mountaintop was death. While Peter, James & John were trying to hold on to all this glory, a cloud overshadowed them, and they heard what Jesus heard at his Baptism, *This is my Son, my Chosen—Listen to Him!* And then, *Jesus was found alone*. It was as if God was pointing beyond the glorious experience to say, THIS is what is at the center – THIS is my Son, my Chosen – Listen to him.

And that overshadowing cloud? It is the same overshadowing that Mary experienced when she was talking to the Angel Gabriel about bearing Jesus – and the Spirit of God overshadowed her - the creative strength and force of God's love available to us and through us.

I hope we can all hear God here, in this worship space, that you feel renewed and refreshed as we worship together, and as we prepare to come down the mountain and into Lent. I invite you to take a few moments to draw strength from the cross. Today it glows with light, but after worship, it will be darkened. So as you sit, remember other crosses you have sat beneath, or gazed upon - crosses from your youth, your journeys, or your family home.

Ask God to show you how best to listen, how best to hear, how best to know for what you are being prepared, and what is being prepared for you.

Lent is the time to listen to God. Amen.

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Resources: Fred Craddock, *Preaching*; Walter Brueggemann, *Festival of Homiletics*