

Transfiguration Sunday – Elizabeth de la Garza-Ahern

Exodus 34:29-35, Psalm 99, 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2, Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

Today's Gospel message from Luke is on the Transfiguration of Jesus. In the Urges Bible Dictionary both, the word Transfiguration and Transformed come from the Greek **metamorphoo**, but transfiguration is defined as "change into another form" while transformed is more in reference to "the change of moral character for the better". It is interesting that Luke does not use the word transfigured as he describes Jesus' appearance as changed and his clothes shining white. One can clearly depict that this change in appearance is presumed to be a heavenly appearance.

This is not the first time that we read about Godly people being drawn to pray on a mountaintop. Jesus is notorious for withdrawing from people and going to pray, but this time he takes Peter, James and John. They were the first disciples to be called by Jesus in the beginning of his ministry and they are a privileged few that get to witness this account.

When I was in youth group, I was also drawn to high hills, but not with the same results. The town where I grew up is called Roma because its founders (when it was a territory of Spain) were reminded of the 7 Hills of Rome in Italy. In fact, behind the church there is a hill from where you can see for miles, even the high hills of La Sierra Madre. The foot of this hill was the sight of our Easter Plays and Christmas celebrations. One Friday evening after youth group, I was drawn away with one of my youth group leaders and a couple other girls to another high point. There we were, on a large white rock that had the perfect curvatures to cradle us on the bluffs along the Rio Grande. The Northern side is higher than the Southern side and we could see the lights and hear the sounds of the city on the other side. My youth group leader and prayer partner was very cool: a blond from California, in her mid 30s (just like Jesus) that spoke in tongues and was a huge fan of Don Johnson from Miami Vice. I do not remember if I was expecting anything from the experience, but soon we heard splashing of water and moaning sounds from a woman down below in the dark waters. The police station was a few yards away on the top so we went and told the officer on duty. He sort of scolded us telling us that we should not be there considering that it is an international boundary and it could be dangerous.

Back to the gospel, so there you have Jesus on this mountaintop praying in his heavenly figure and the disciples see two men talking to him. The Scriptures say that it is Moses and Elijah. My question is, how do they know that it is Moses and Elijah? What characteristics do these men demonstrate that give it away? Does Jesus make introductions or does he later explain to them, 'by the way, those two guys talking with me earlier were Moses and Elijah.' Nowhere did I find an explanation of how they knew this. What the commentaries do mention is that both Moses and Elijah were supposed to return and that Moses represents the law and Elijah the

prophets of the old covenant. No one asserts for sure the purpose and meaning of this passage. It is full of mystery, with plenty of significance that makes me gasp for air just to imagine it.

So here we have Elijah and Moses with their glory or heavenly appearance and they were speaking of Jesus' departure. Jesus' departure, meaning Jesus death or exodus from this world. This was to take place in Jerusalem. Jesus had already told them in the passage just before that "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Peter, James and John were sleepy and as they were leaving Peter gets caught up in the moment and tells Jesus ' Master, let's build three memorials: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." The Scripture says that he did not know what he was saying. I supposed it is because Jesus is not on equal footing with the other two as he is the Son of God and, after all, Jesus had not died yet.

Then a cloud came and they were afraid as they entered it. From the cloud they heard a voice saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen: listen to him!" This is significant as it validates Christ identity as the Son of God. The first thing that came to my mind when I read the "listen to him" part, was that we need to be reminded to listen to Christ even today. There are so many distractions and we are constantly battling the world, the flesh and the devil. In a similar manner, God himself had to reprimand them, saying LISTEN... it is important that you pay attention. One commentary explained more in terms of the transferring into the new covenant. In other words, "you Jewish people have been following Moses and the Prophets, but now it is time to listen to Jesus and follow him".

But even after such a mountain high experience, we all must face the realities of earthly living, the mundane and even suffering. The next morning, as they were coming down from the mountain, a crowd met them and a man with a desperate plea surfaces. The man's only son had an unclean spirit that manifested itself as described – similar to an epileptic. It is interesting that the disciples had not been able to cast it out, even though earlier in the text they had performed such miracles when Jesus had commissioned the twelve. In Luke 9:1-2 "he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure disease, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." I can't help to wonder, what happened? They lost it so soon. Then, Jesus appears irritated with a generation that has no sense of God. I wonder, does Jesus become irritated with us too when we fail to perform according to his expectations? Anyway, Jesus ordered the demon out and healed the boy without hesitation. Through which God's greatness was manifested and the people were amazed.

In the Exodus story, Moses undergoes a type of transfiguration on a mountain as well. The text says that when he would come down from Mount Sinai after speaking with God, his face shone. This is during the time that God is carving a covenant with Israel and is scripting the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets. The Israelites were afraid of his appearance and he

would put the veil to cover his radiance. In this story, we see how God wants to be part of man's lives, but for some reason, there has to be an intermediary. Moses serves as the intermediary and his appearance is affected by being in God's presence.

Psalm 99 speaks of the majesty and glory of God. His Holy personality and attributes: one who loves justice and equality. One whose Holiness should be worshiped. Looking back to those who called onto his name, like Moses, Aaron and Samuel and how God responded... speaking to them in a pillar of cloud at his holy mountain and makes reference to the covenant through the law given in the commandments. God is one who answers and forgives, but punishes wrongdoing. We are to praise the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain (which we see in Exodus and Luke); for the Lord our God is holy. Now, I feel like I need to figure out the topography around me. What would his holy mountain look like from here?

Paul tells the Corinthian church in his second letter that we are not like the Israelites because there is no fading of God's glory here. In Christ, we can now see with Spiritual eyes and we can be open with one another in the truth and in God's sight. That is why we can have such great hope and act with boldness.

"But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Taken away... Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another – into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, for this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

And to think that it all starts with each one of us, when we turn to the Lord, the veil is removed, bringing freedom, transformation and glory. Do you see it? It is a glory that has been bestowed to us as bearer of God's image.

When I first read these passages of Scripture I was waiting in the car for my daughter who was at a horseback-riding cattle sorting show. I read in the Gospel of Luke first and was reminded of the time that this scripture first came alive when I was in youth group and could clearly picture this mountaintop experience. Then I read Exodus, and realize, yeah Moses is undergoing some sort of transfiguration as a result of being in the presence of God on Mount Sinai. Then, I read the Psalm and yeah, the Lord is Holy and should be worshiped, but where in Illinois am I going to find a mountain? But when I read 2 Corinthians – a letter written to gentiles – "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" I was brought to tears because what I saw flashing at me was **a comparison of our image transformation with the Messiah's Glorious Transfiguration**. Now, I checked several Bibles with different translations to see if they used the term transfiguration here. To my great surprise Eugene Peterson's The Message does: "Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are **transfigured** much like the Messiah, our

lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.”

John Eldridge in his book, Waking the Dead, reminds us that: No, it is not pretentious or prideful to think that we bear the image of God. In Romans 8:30 it says, “Those he justified he also glorified”. It is a glory bestowed to us. Humility tells us that we bear a glory for sure, but it is a reflected glory, given to us by grace. Therefore, let your light shine so that you can be fully alive! (Paraphrased)

God has wanted so badly to commune with us from the beginning, through Moses and the Prophets and provided salvation through his Son Jesus Christ. He has revealed his redemptive desire for us through the Scriptures. It all starts with us, when we turn to him, as we grow in him we become more like him, through Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which comfort us. We are transformed, or should I say transfigured – into His Image (a glorious image). Amen