

## Sermon – Transfiguration, Year C, March 3, 2019

- You might recall that at the very beginning of Luke's gospel Luke tells us that his purpose in writing this gospel is to "write an orderly account" so that we "may know the truth concerning the things about which [we] have been instructed".
- Luke's purpose is to lay out for us the truth concerning Jesus of Nazareth.
- And in this story that we heard today, the story of the Transfiguration, we have a particular moment when that truth is laid out before us,
  - a moment when the purpose and the presence of God is revealed in startling clarity.
- And you might recall that Moses and Elijah, both appearing here with Jesus, were witness to such moments in their own lives.
- Moses' first encounter with God comes when he stands before a bush that burns but is not consumed.
  - That is something that strains our immediate comprehension, yet, at the same time, the very strangeness of that event makes it for Moses a moment of recognition,
    - a moment of altered perception and new understanding.
- For Moses, it was a moment of encounter, certainly, with a God who moves in ways that are not bound by conventional expectations,
  - but it was also a moment of calling, of purpose, of commissioning.
    - His task - to lead the people of Israel out of captivity and oppression in the land of Egypt into freedom and a new land of promise.
- And this is not the only time that Moses has such an encounter.
- In today's reading from the book of Exodus, we are reminded of Moses' subsequent meeting with God on Mt Sinai, and his ongoing encounters with God in the tent of meeting where God would speak with him "face to face".
- These encounters so "lit up" Moses' own face that his fellow Israelites were afraid to look upon him and he had to wear a veil.
- But, again, Moses' experience of God and his subsequent changed appearance, as uncanny and bewildering and extraordinary as it was, speak of recognition and new understanding as Moses makes known God's promises to God's people and God's call to the people to enter into this covenant relationship with God.
- The prophet Elijah has a similar experience.

- He is not transfigured, but his encounter with God is no less transformational.
- You might recall the story of Elijah, alone and afraid, running for his life.
- He is being pursued by Queen Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of Israel, who has promoted the worship of the Caananite god Ba'al.
- Elijah has just been victorious in a kind of duel with the prophets of Ba'al to assert the power and ultimacy of the God of Israel.
- But now he is a wanted man and his fear and exhaustion and isolation have taken a toll on him.
- Yet God calls him and sustains him and brings him to this cave on the holy mountain where he sees and experiences God.
- There is a violent windstorm, then an earthquake and then a fire.
- But Elijah experiences God in none of those things, but in "the sound of sheer silence".
- And in this experience he is yet able to go on,
  - sustained by the peace of God's presence and the power and assurance of God's word to him in that moment.
- Seemingly inexplicable encounters of wonder and awe that bring us to an awareness of God's presence and God's power and God's call on our lives - these are what Moses and Elijah experienced.
- And the same is true for us in our experience of Jesus.
- And the story of the Transfiguration expresses something of that experience.
- Jesus has taken Peter and James and John with him up the mountain to pray but it seems that are having difficulty staying awake.
- But then in their sleep-befuddled state they see Jesus transfigured before them,
  - his face changed,
  - his clothes dazzling white.
- And then, suddenly, there are Moses and Elijah talking with him.
- And Peter, James and John come fully awake to the glory of God revealed in their sight.
- And then there is that voice from the cloud that overshadows them,
  - "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him."
- And after that - nothing.

- Jesus is found alone,
  - no fading hint of light or brightness attached to him.
  - no lasting glimmer of glory,
  - no quietly diminishing afterglow witnessing to what has just happened,
    - simply Jesus found alone and the disciples in silence.
  
- And who among us can relate to that?
  - A moment of holy awe and wonder,
  - a moment of encounter with the divine when we come awake to the glory of God,
    - and then...nothing, or at least the appearance of nothing, when the ordinary and the everyday come to the fore again.
  
- And yet, as in the stories of Moses and Elijah, as in the story of Jesus' own transfiguration, these moments are more than just moments.
- They are more than just a flare of brilliance,
  - more than a momentary experience of awe and wonder.
- They are an announcement of God's presence and an announcement of a story and a future that is yet unfolding.
  
- God's call to Moses in the burning bush is not an isolated event but part of the unfolding story of God's liberation of the people of Israel from their captivity and oppression in Egypt.
- God's word to Elijah out of that experience of silence is not an isolated event, but a word of encouragement and a call to ongoing action:
  - "This is not yet the end," is God's word to Elijah.
  
- And so too, Jesus' transfiguration and the voice from heaven, declare not only God's presence in that moment, in Jesus, but also the promise of God's continuing story of liberation.
  
- When Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus on the mountain, they speak about Jesus' departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.
- What they are speaking of when they speak of Jesus' departure is Jesus' death and his resurrection and his ascension.
- And it is no accident that the word that is translated here as "departure" is the Greek word exodus.
- It is no accident that Jesus' death and his resurrection and ascension recall God's act of liberation in bringing the people out of captivity and oppression in Egypt.

- The word exodus literally means "road out" and we are meant to understand that in Jesus - in his life and death and resurrection - God is giving us a way out from all that might be possessing us or oppressing us.
- The resurrection of Jesus is the promise that when we are in the midst of death and it seems that all has come to an end, there is yet a way out, that God's promise of life and love, is the promise of life beyond death in all its forms, of hope beyond despair.
- That, of course, is good news!
  
- But there is also more.
- The experiences of Moses and Elijah and the transfiguration of Jesus tell us that when we experience moments of encounter with God -
  - whether it is in the mystery and wonder of the natural world,
  - or in those unlooked for, unanticipated, moments of grace and joy in the midst of challenge and difficulty,
  - or whether it is in the sound of sheer silence when we are in the stillness of prayer -
    - ...those are moments of rejoicing.
- But the experiences of Moses and Elijah and the transfiguration of Jesus, and, indeed, our own experiences, also tell us that when the power of those moments fades,
  - when those moments are no longer felt with such vivid clarity,
  - when those moments pass, as they will,
    - God's purpose is yet in motion, God's purpose is yet unfolding, the fullness of God's good future is yet coming.
  
- And the purpose of God is to offer us a way out into freedom, healing and joy.