

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska.
Message from Rev. Israel Portilla-Gómez, Associate Rector
August 6, 2023. The Feast of the Transfiguration

Scripture readings

Exodus 34: 29-35; Psalm 145: 8-22; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Luke 9: 28-436

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

Unlike the previous two Sundays, this Sunday, nobody is threatened to be thrown into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Instead, today we are celebrating the transfiguration of our Lord. The gospel begins with Jesus going up a mountain to pray. On Friday, I also went up to a mountain at Denali Park. I returned from Denali Park with this sermon and sore legs.

The central message is that Jesus is the key to interpreting and understanding the Word of God. No one before or after him occupies the center of God's message for humanity because Jesus is God too. We will see this in the story of the transfiguration through three events.

1. Jesus "was praying, and the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white." He is the only one with an illuminated face because Jesus is the definitive light to guide our lives.

2. Moses and Elijah appear in the conversation. Let us remember that Moses is the great leader of the people of Israel. Elijah is considered the greatest and most wonderful prophet of the Old Testament. In these two people, the Law and the Prophets are put together. However, they are subservient to Jesus. It can be seen in today's gospel because the conversation is related to Jesus and his departure from this world. In addition, they do not have any special message to tell us because the culmination of all law and prophecy has Jesus as its end.

3. Peter wanted to make three dwellings for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. That is, Peter thinks that all three are equal. He did not fully understand the relevance and priority of Jesus. But while



Jawbone, by Douglas Ramsey, 2014.

Peter was talking about it, he was interrupted, and a cloud came to clarify things: "This is my Son, My Chosen; listen to him." The message is clear; Jesus is God's salvation plan. The last word falls on Jesus.

With these three events it is clear that Jesus is not just one more prophet; he is the center of our interpretation of faith; therefore we put Jesus in the center.

The idea of transfiguration was already known in the Old Testament, however, with a different emphasis. For example, there is a similar passage:

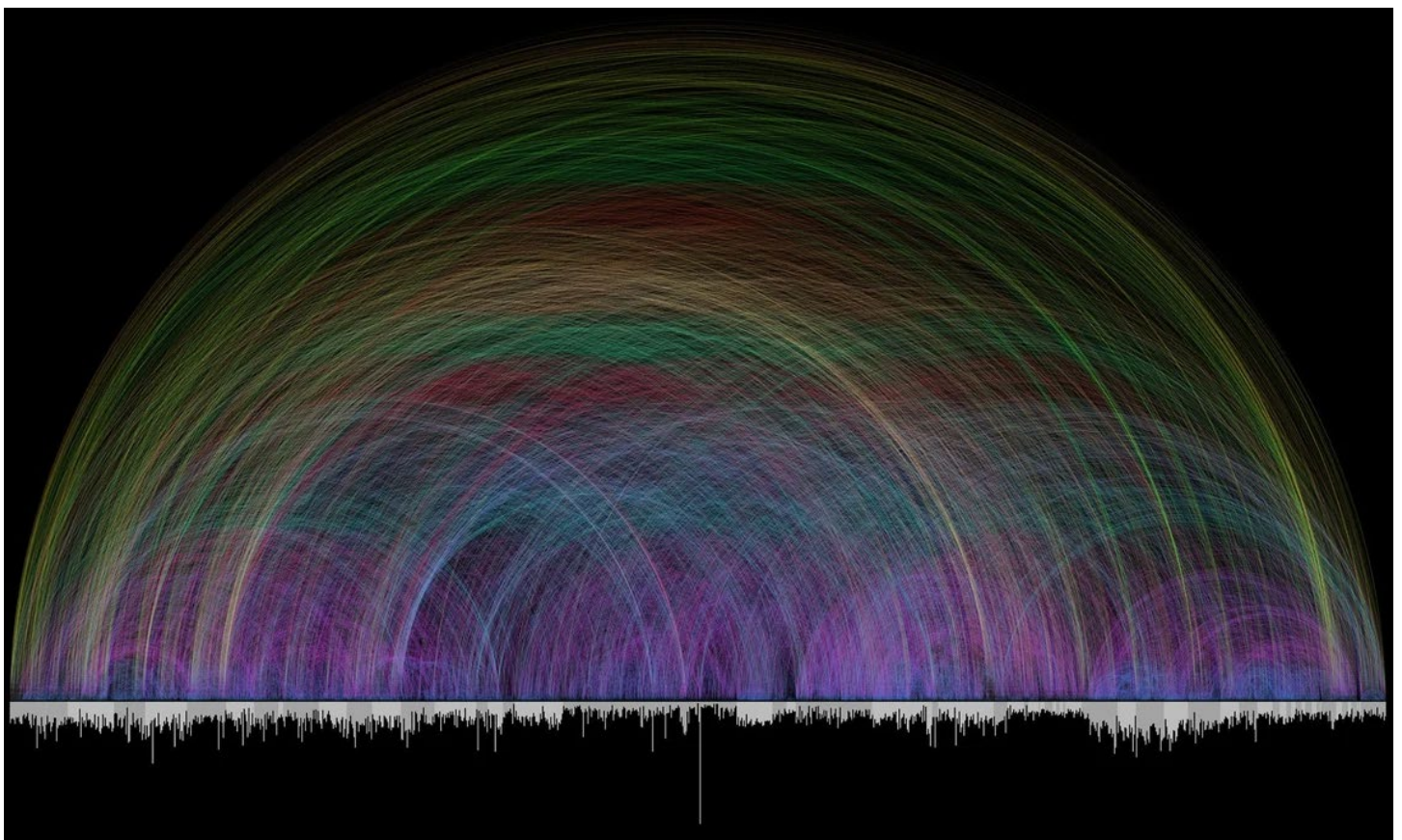
"The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the binding dropped from his

hands. Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men." Who is the He this passage talks about? It sounds like it's not a very Jesus-like transfiguration. It seems like quite a violent transfiguration.

In general, throughout the Bible, we find some passages where it is difficult to see God. Human beings in our imperfections, culture, traditions, or interests have often misinterpreted who God is. Therefore, we find cruelty, violence, misogyny, discrimination, and many other things put into the mouth of God. So how to understand the Bible and what it wants to tell us? It is through Jesus's life and teachings that things and events can be explained. Everything is transformed in him because he is the fulfillment of what God wants to tell us. Let us remember how he contradicted and corrected other biblical customs on several occasions.

Despite the fragility of human beings to understand divine designs, God has shown himself faithful, compassionate, and loving to us throughout the Scriptures.

I want to share the Cross-Reference Bible. Have you heard about it? "Cross-references are conceptual links between verses, connecting locations, people, phrases, and so on, that are found in different parts of the Bible." This type of Bible was made by Christoph Römhilda, a Lutheran Pastor in Germany, and Chris Harrison, a professor of Human-Computer interaction at Carnegie Mellon University, in Pennsylvania. They created a multi-colored arc diagram consisting of 63,779 cross-references. It looks like this:



Each bar along the horizontal axis represents a chapter, with the length determined by the number of verses. (Books alternate in color between white and light gray.) Colors represent the distance between references.

What is your impression about this image?

I think it is amazing how in the middle of many things, God connects the history of humanity and gives Himself to us in Jesus Christ.

God's connection to us is through abundant love that looks for us and gives meaning to our life. That is the transfiguration to which Jesus invites us. Let us continue listening to his word, follow his example, and make it true in us. Or as Saint Nilo would say: "I interpret the Scripture with my life."