



St. Mary's Episcopal Church
February 27, 2022
Last Sunday of Epiphany, Year C
Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]
Message by Rev. Michael Burke

Let us stop and name where we are in this present moment.

Over the past 23 months, our own Anchorage community and our nation have been largely self-absorbed, (and for good reason, I suppose) due to both the pandemic and politics.

The incessant demands of the COVID epidemic have left most of us frustrated and exhausted. Some of our elders have lived the last two years fairly isolated, without much travel, nor the usual visits from friends, children, and grandchildren. Parents have had to juggle so many demands – home-school, Zoom school, back-to-school, balancing the safety of their loved ones with the mental health and well-being of all. Friends – I see you. We, your family of faith, see you. I know, and we know - it has been hard on so many levels.

And in our nation's political life, partisan divisions that have long since passed the point of absurdity. Just a few weeks ago, on an Alaskan conservative news site, for example, I saw where our Congressman Don Young was derided as a "R.I.N.O" and "a far-left Marxist."

And then, almost overnight, the world has changed.

Columns of tanks rolled across the Ukrainian border from four directions. Belgium's Prime Minister called this "Europe's darkest hour since WWII."

What happens next is incredibly consequential.



And yet, I don't believe that we've yet felt the full weight of this. It still seems a bit unreal, far-away and of little relevance to our daily lives. Many of us are still in a somewhat calm state of disbelief.

For our younger folks, it might be hard for you to understand the concern and perhaps fear you might sense from some of your elders. But for those who grew up or lived through the cold war, the TV images of rolling tanks brought a chill to our bones. Yesterday, I remembered something that I had not thought about for many many years – but I recalled being a first grader in elementary school, and having regular “duck and cover” air raid drills in which the teachers instructed us how to crawl under our desks with our hands interlocked over the backs of our necks. That's an experience most people under 55 never knew.



So here we are. Down here. On this level place. Where life happens.

And we also have the Gospel passage today, of a startling scene in Scripture, **up there**, high upon the mountain.

If this were a film, it would open with a tight camera shot of Jesus, praying. ...High upon the mountain, praying. We spoke two weeks ago about the significance of mountains in Old Testament biblical imagery – the place one goes to meet God, and to hear God's voice.

And while he is praying, Jesus's face becomes transformed. More precisely, he becomes *transfigured*. Transfigured, in the context of “**glory**”, is to have the outer appearance of something changed so that its inner essence is revealed.

In the Hebrew Scripture we heard this morning, which begins the iconic Exodus story, Moses is waiting upon the mountain when God descends in a cloud, speaking to Moses. Later, when Moses descends to the people on the “level place” below, his face shines with the reflected glory of God.

Here too, in the Gospel for today, Jesus's face is transformed, and even his clothes begin to glow with dazzling light. The camera would pull back, showing James and John and Peter upon the mountain, first, weighed down with sleep, their eyes heavy and weary, but now wide awake!

And then, the scene widens further still, and Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah, also transfigured in glory and dazzling light! The biblical passage is filled with illusions and imagery from earlier scripture, including the Book of Daniel, and images of light, seeing, and hearing. Moses and the prophet Elijah set Jesus in the presence of the law and the prophets, and in accord with them, for he comes not to abolish but to fulfill.

Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about his “departure,” but the word in the original Greek is the word for “exodus” (εξοδος).¹ Many years later, the same Apostle Peter will use this same word, exodus, to speak of his own impending martyrdom and death.²

Peter on the mountain unsuccessfully tries to make sense of it all, and while he is attempting to do so, a cloud descends, and a Voice is heard, harkening back to Jesus’s own calling and baptism in the river Jordan: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

For from that moment onward, as Jesus and his disciples depart from the mountain, the exodus begins: a journey of Jesus down the high mountain to the low places of the plain below, with his face set firmly toward Jerusalem. There in Jerusalem awaits Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, wherein the weight of the pain and the suffering of the world itself is transfigured, and, in the imagery of scripture and our Eucharistic prayers, out of death comes life.

The Transfiguration on the mountain is a pivotal scene the life of Jesus, and the account of it occurs in all three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and it is alluded to in the first chapter of the Gospel of John.³ It portrays Jesus as the bridge between humanity and divinity, where human need is transformed by the power of God.

There is so much more to be said, but little time this day to say it all.

I’ve been thinking this past week of our faith community, as we prepare to return to an on-campus option for worship on this upcoming Wednesday, what we call “Ash Wednesday,” the beginning of the season of Lent. Lent is for us a time of facing our own mortality, but not simply that we might become preoccupied with death.

Rather, the season of Lent just ahead of us is a time in which we contemplate our own mortality *in order that we might see, hear, and be transformed by the grace and glory of God in the world around us.*

“The origins of Lent were that one was to leave their old life behind to fast and prepare to be baptized into a new way of living. In essence, this was a practice of stepping away from corrupt power, scarcity mentality, and empty rituals in order to live a more expansive and full life of faith. And so, our Lenten theme, *Full to the Brim*, is an invitation—into a radically different Lent, into a full life. It’s an invitation to be authentically who you are, to counter scarcity and injustice at every turn, to pour out even more grace wherever it is needed. When we allow ourselves to be *filled to the brim* with God’s lavish love, that love spills over. It reaches beyond ourselves; like water, it rushes and flows, touching everything in its path.”⁴

¹ See: <https://in.lcms.org/christs-departure-exodus/>

² 2 Peter 1:15: “And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure (*exodus*) you may be able to call these things to mind.”

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transfiguration_of_Jesus. In reference to John 1:15, see also Lee, Dorothy (2004). *Transfiguration*. Bloomsbury Academic. ISBN 978-0-8264-7595-4.

⁴ A direct quote from: <https://sanctifiedart.org/full-to-the-brim-lent-bundle-year-c>

How do the sights and sounds around us:

- those of tanks rolling into Ukraine, women and children crouching in fear in makeshift subway bomb shelters...
- those of bone-tired parents and elders, weary from the almost two years of pandemic overwork and isolation,
- those of protest, and divisions, and mis-information...

how do these images of the world that surrounds us, how does an image from high upon the mountain, a holy glimpse of something larger than ourselves, larger than this life of brokenness and pain, how does this Transfiguration of Jesus into The Christ change everything?

How does a momentary fleeting glimpse of the Holy give *us* strength in times of exodus?

And why was the experience of the Transfiguration upon the mountain given to disciples and to Jesus before the descent toward Jerusalem and the times of trial? Why does it even matter?

Was it because they all – including Jesus himself – needed to experience it to be able to face what was to come?

I will leave us all with those questions, that we might live deeply into them in the days and the season of Lent to come. In the printed copy of this sermon, which is usually posted on our website, GodsView.org within a few hours after each Sunday service, I have also included links to resources for contemplative prayer, *that we might have tools and practical helps to reflect on what this all means for our lives and our times. That we too might find strength for our times.*

And finally, let me leave you these questions as well:

- why did the Evangelist Luke, from whose Gospel account the Transfiguration is read today, not *end* the passage with Jesus and the disciples still high upon the mountain?
- Why did Luke consider it *essential* to complete this story of the Transfiguration with what happened next: a child in need - at first shrieking, convulsing, and foaming at the mouth – then healed by the power of God through Jesus, and then finally lovingly and gently given back into the care of his family...
- Why, exactly, is the Transfiguration story told twice – once high upon the mountain, and once far below, in the level places of the plain, where we live the vast portion of our lives... .. once with Jesus, and once with us?

That's all we have time for this morning. Watch your mailboxes, something important is coming to you. Next week, Dawn will welcome us into a season of Lent unlike any we have walk through before. I wish you Grace. I wish for you and this world strength and peace, in times like these. Amen.

The Collect

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Old Testament - Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

The Psalm - Psalm 99

1 The Lord is King;
let the people tremble; *
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.

2 The Lord is great in Zion; *
he is high above all peoples.

3 Let them confess his Name, which is great and awesome; *
he is the Holy One.

4 "O mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity; *
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob."

5 Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God
and fall down before his footstool; *
he is the Holy One.

6

6 Moses and Aaron among his priests,
and Samuel among those who call upon his Name, *
they called upon the Lord, and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; *
they kept his testimonies and the decree that he gave them.

8 O Lord our God, you answered them indeed; *
you were a God who forgave them,
yet punished them for their evil deeds.

9 Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God
and worship him upon his holy hill; *
for the Lord our God is the Holy One.

The New Testament - 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the 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; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

The Gospel - Luke 9:28-36, 37-43a

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice

had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Prayers for Ukraine

Gracious and loving God, watch over the people of Ukraine. Sustain their leaders, protect her people, frustrate the efforts of her oppressors. Give the leaders and people of our countries courage and a capacity for sacrifice in their defense. And strengthen the world in its resolve to name and resist tyranny wherever it may be found. In the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Savior, who with you and the Holy Spirit, reign one God, now and forever. Amen (Frederick Schmidt)⁵

Gracious and merciful Lord, these are fear filled days. Millions of our brothers and sisters are in harm's way. Tyranny threatens the wellbeing of our world. Remind us of your promise to be with us. Deepen our faith in that promise and its claim upon our lives. And lead us to draw strength from that place hidden in you, where no enemy can reach and no power or principality reigns. Grant that we might live this day with confidence in that promise and in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. All this we ask in the name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, reign one God, now and forever. Amen (Frederick Schmidt)⁶



40 Short Prayers During Lent:

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/publictheology/2022/02/40-short-prayers-for-lent-2022/>

⁵ From: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/whatgodwantsforyourlife/2022/02/prayers-for-the-people-of-ukraine/>

⁶ Ibid.

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
 vacation with pay. Want more
 of everything ready-made. Be afraid
 to know your neighbors and to die.
 And you will have a window in your head.
 Not even your future will be a mystery
 any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
 and shut away in a little drawer.
 When they want you to buy something
 they will call you. When they want you
 to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
 that won't compute. Love the Lord.
 Love the world. Work for nothing.
 Take all that you have and be poor.
 Love someone who does not deserve it.
 Denounce the government and embrace
 the flag. Hope to live in that free
 republic for which it stands.
 Give your approval to all you cannot
 understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
 has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
 Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
 Say that your main crop is the forest
 that you did not plant,
 that you will not live to harvest.
 Say that the leaves are harvested
 when they have rotted into the mold.
 Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
 that will build under the trees
 every thousand years.
 Listen to carrion – put your ear
 close, and hear the faint chattering
 of the songs that are to come.
 Expect the end of the world. Laugh.

Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
 though you have considered all the facts.
 So long as women do not go cheap
 for power, please women more than men.
 Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
 a woman satisfied to bear a child?
 Will this disturb the sleep
 of a woman near to giving birth?

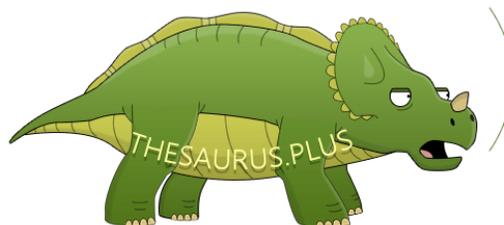
Go with your love to the fields.
 Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
 in her lap. Swear allegiance
 to what is highest your thoughts.
 As soon as the generals and the politicians
 can predict the motions of your mind,
 lose it. Leave it as a sign
 to mark the false trail, the way
 you didn't go. Be like the fox
 who makes more tracks than necessary,
 some in the wrong direction.
 Practice resurrection.

~*Wendell Berry*

*("Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front"
 from The Country of Marriage, copyright ©
 1973 by Wendell Berry)*

antonyms for resist:

surrender, accept, give in, allow, agree, succumb,
 yield, assist, comply, help



From Marianne Williamson's book [A Return to Love](#).

Williamson writes (the bold is my emphasis):

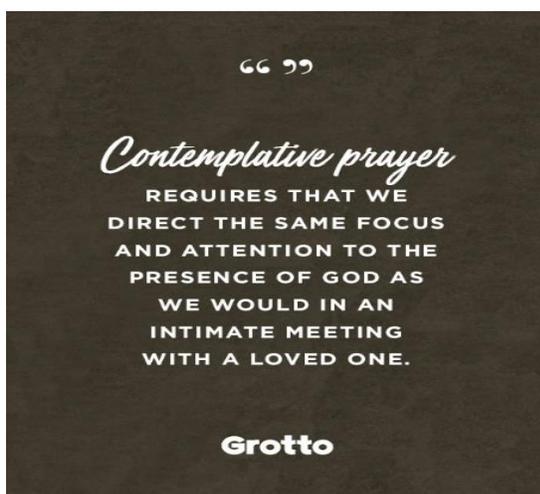
Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our **light**, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be **brilliant**, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing **enlightened** about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to **shine**, as children do. We were born to make manifest the **glory of God that is within** us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own **light shine**, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Resources for Further Study or Practice

The Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition has perhaps the most robust conception of what it may mean to practice transfiguration. They call this practice "theosis" or "divinization." See, for example, [Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions](#), by [Michael J. Christensen](#) (Editor), [Jeffery A. Wittung](#) (Editor)



A good introduction to contemplative practices is Daniel Wolpert's book [Creating a Life with God: The Call of Ancient Prayer Practices](#).



See also: <https://grottonetwork.com/keep-the-faith/prayer/what-is-contemplative-prayer/>
and
<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/ignatian-contemplation-imaginative-prayer/>
and
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/resources/>
and
<https://www.lindsayboyer.com/centering-prayer>