

### “Listen Up”

Transfiguration seems like such a strange thing. We read about it a couple of times in the Bible, but I think most of us would not consider it part of our everyday experience. But I think you might have more experience of it than you think. For example, have you ever seen a woman after she has given birth? She is the same woman, but something is certainly changed about her. Perhaps you have seen a youngster when he has performed a solo for the first time, or a little one when mom or dad comes home after a long trip. These people are not changed from who they were, but there is something about them that is different. They seem to glow with joy. Their countenance radiates a sense of transcendence. They are on another plane from where they were before.

Another example would be a person who has had a powerful spiritual experience. It could be something as special as a trip to Israel or walking the Camino de Santiago. It could be something as simple as a retreat with the brothers in Berryville or a particularly enlightening walk in the forest. In religious circles we call this a mountaintop experience. That is they remind us of how Moses was changed when he spoke with God on Mt. Sinai or how Jesus was transfigured as in today’s Gospel. Mountaintop experiences can be so powerful that we don’t want to let them go. We want to stay in that state of joy, bliss, and connection with God, because it feels so good.

In Luke’s Gospel, which we began reading with the beginning of the church year in Advent, Jesus has already had some powerful experiences. He was baptized by John in the Jordan and heard the voice of God call him the beloved. He has been tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He went home to Nazareth to share his ministry and found his neighbors supremely unwelcoming. He has called his disciples, preached, taught and healed throughout Galilee and Gerasenes (that is the Jewish and Gentile sides of the Sea of Galilee). It has been a powerful and busy time.

In the midst of such times, it is Jesus’ habit to get away from the crowds in order to pray. Mountaintops are good places for this it seems. They are also symbolic for that is where a number of Old Testament figures encounter God. When Jesus heads to the mountain he takes with him his inner circle of disciples—Peter, James and John. While the four of them were in prayer Jesus has one of those mountaintop experiences. Luke writes that, “The appearance of his face changed and his clothes became “dazzling white.” What’s more the three disciples witness this and witness Jesus talking with two men—Moses and Elijah.

You might remember that when we talked about prophets a few weeks ago I pointed out that Moses is considered to be the proto-prophet in Judaism. If Moses is the archetype for a prophet then Elijah is the one who perfected being a prophet. What’s more both of these men had profound experiences of God on mountains. Moses encountered God on Mt. Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments among other teachings from God. While hiding out in a cave on Mt. Horeb (another name for Mt. Sinai) Elijah experiences God not in a wind, fire or earthquake but in a “still small voice.”

Luke puts us in an evocative setting to further reveal who Jesus is. That is he is in direct line with Moses and Elijah. He seeks their advice in a mountaintop setting.

He does so in front of his closest companions. Additionally God reveals to them something that had only been revealed to Jesus before, that is that Jesus is beloved of God. God goes on to tell the three, in case there was any question after all of this that they should listen to Jesus. In is no surprise that the disciples are dumbstruck in the presence of all of this. Peter makes a rather inadequate attempt to memorialize the events, which Jesus ignores. The three remain unable to talk about what happened in the coming days.

One aspect that seems to glide past us is what Jesus, Moses and Elijah were talking about, which only occurs in LUke. The NRSV translation says that they, "...were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." This sounds a bit like Jesus was going to be heading for the airport or to take a cruise ship. The Greek word that is being translated as departure is exodus. They are talking not about a trip somewhere but Jesus' personally exodus, another Moses allusion, from this world to the promised land of heaven where he will sit at the right hand of the Father. More specifically we can imagine that Moses and Elijah are telling Jesus that his departure from this world will not be like theirs. He will not die of extreme old age as did Moses. Nor will he be whisked up into heaven while he is still alive as was Elijah. Jesus' departure will be at the hands of the Romans who will execute him.

When Jesus comes down from the mountain we could imagine he would have second thoughts about his exodus. Perhaps instead of Jerusalem he might head toward Lebanon or Syria. After all there were many people to teach and heal in those regions. Yet after a couple of healings and teachings Luke tells us that "Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the intervening actions by Jesus might be part of his reconciling himself to what is to come. When he has settled his mind and heart he puts his feet on the road and points himself toward Jerusalem.

It is one of the marks of Luke's Gospel that from here forward he has Jesus moving inexorably toward Jerusalem. He will make stops to heal, teach, and eat along the way, but his face is set toward Jerusalem. Jesus is not fatalistic in this situation. He does not plod toward Jerusalem with a woe is me attitude. Some of the most powerful and memorable parts of his ministry are yet to come. We have yet to hear his parables of the Good Samaritan, the Rich Fool, or the Prodigal Son. He will have his encounter with Mary and Martha and another with Zacchaeus. This and much more happen before he enters Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week.

Jesus glory has been revealed to us and the disciples today. We have been to the mountaintop now we get to walk with Jesus over the coming weeks as he sets his face toward Jerusalem. Let us take part in the journey during the season of Lent that begins this week. As Fr. Steve Wade instructed us in January we can live into the Gospel stories imagining ourselves walking with Jesus and the disciples, observing them from the crowd, or encountering Jesus as he heals and teaches his way from town to town.

Let us set our faces toward Jerusalem this Lent and find our own mountaintop experiences, because we like Peter, James and John have heard the voice tell us, "This is my Son the beloved, listen to him."

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:51 NRSV