

## “Transfigured for Love”

Each of us has one or two or more things that we know a lot about. Within that special area of expertise there is jargon, the words that we know that when we speak them no one else understands. We often run into that here in church when someone, usually me, starts talking theological concepts. Take for instance that long creed we read last week—The Athanasian Creed. In that case we read about the persons of the Trinity and the substance of the persons. Now we know what person and substance mean in everyday life, but in the context of the creed a person “is not an individual center of consciousness as in modern usage but rather an eternal principle of subsistence within the Godhead.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the word substance in theological terms “usually refers to the underlying reality of a thing, in contrast to its ‘accidents.’”<sup>2</sup> And an accident is the “property of a thing that is not essential to its nature.”<sup>3</sup>

This is not just a theological dilemma. If we asked Ron Lang to explain the ins and outs of flying and F4 Phantom, or Kevin Daly how to command a tank platoon, or Christine Krieger the positions of yoga, or Viviane Warren about journalism, or any of you about an area where you have special knowledge or expertise we would have similar issues. There would most likely be a new set of words and meanings that would be necessary to understand it more thoroughly.

Not only is there a difference in language there is also a difference in the way we use our senses to experience something. A wine expert does not just say that the wine tastes good. She tells us what those tastes are that she is experiencing such as red berries, tar, tobacco, tropical fruits, flowers, etc. She can identify a spectrum of flavors and aromas that she detects. A veterinarian does not just see a sick horse, but can tell by how the horse is acting or holding itself what might be the problem. An art expert can help us see how the painter used his brush, paint, palette and vision to make a work of art that is pleasing and also edifying. Their years of study has helped them to see anew what was there all along but perhaps invisible.

I wonder if that is not what happened to the three disciples on that mountain on the day of the Transfiguration. Peter, James and John were Jesus’ inner circle. Whenever something particular powerful was about to happen these were the three that Jesus separated from the rest of the disciples to accompany him. These three being closest to Jesus had perhaps developed a clearer sense of who Jesus is.

I would not say that they had it all worked out, but it was only a short while earlier in the Gospel of Luke that Peter responded to Jesus’ question of “But who do you say that I am?” by saying “The Messiah, the Christ of God.”<sup>4</sup> Peter at least is understanding that Jesus is more than an itinerant Rabbi. Peter is willing to say that Jesus is God’s anointed one. Jesus, like Saul and David, is for Peter the deliverer of his people anointed and sent by God. This anointing is much more than giving someone a blessing. Jesus’ anointing is equivalent to him being commissioned by God to do something important, sacred, and crucial for the wellbeing of all of the world.

The three disciples were not aware of what might happen as they ascended the mountain with Jesus. While Jesus was praying on the mountain the three of them took a nap. [As an aside, does this scene remind you of another scene in the Gospels?

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<sup>1</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *Essential Theological Terms* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005] page 131

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, page 167

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, page 1

<sup>4</sup> Luke 9:20 NRSVUE

How about when Jesus went away to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane and the three of them feel asleep.] When they awaken their eyes being readied to see Jesus as Christ also see Moses and Elijah with him. These two men represent the Law and the Prophets, the two most important sections of the Hebrew scriptures. You undoubtedly recall the passage that is called the Great Commandment. That is when Jesus is asked what is the most important of the commandments and Jesus answers not with one portion of the Decalogue, but instead responds with “Love the Lord your God with all your soul, and all your heart and all your might. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it though shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hand all the law and the prophets.” Now we have the law and prophets embodied in Moses and Elijah.

In this passage Peter, James and John were seeing for the first time seeing Jesus in his wholeness. They were given the gift of recognizing that Jesus was not only the Christ, but the fulfillment of what had been written in the sacred scriptures of Judaism. As special and marvelous as Jesus is, the term Christ or Messiah only touches the surface of his mission and ministry. God has wooed the people of Israel for centuries only to find that they would wander away like lost sheep to something new and glittering on the horizon. Their wandering frustrated the possibility of the relationship God spoke so profoundly about when God said that the word would be written on our hearts.<sup>5</sup> God decided that writing it within us was not enough. God needed to show us in the person of the Son what it would mean to live into God’s word. By sending the Eternal Son to be our teacher and example of what living God’s word means.

We are called this Feast of the Transfiguration to take the challenge that was first offered to Peter, James and John. That is to wake up to the power of God’s message in the person of Jesus Christ. To live as he lived loving God with all his heart, soul and might. To love all of humanity with the same lovingkindness as Jesus does.

We too can be transfigured into the person we were made to be and have been meant to be from the time were knit together inside our mother’s womb.<sup>6</sup> Let us not miss the opportunity to become the person the world needs us to be. The one the world aches and groans for us to be. We are God’s beloved. Listen to God’s blessing, accept it in all its wonder and beauty take it in like we take in the elements of Holy Communion. Then do the most wonderful thing of all and share it with everyone you meet day by day. Perhaps they will be transfigured too.

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<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 31:33, 2 Corinthians 3:3

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 139:13b