

Transfiguration Sunday (Year C)

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*Luke 9:28-43a*

*Now about eight days after these sayings 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 throws him into convulsions 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.*

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My name is Peter. Well, it is *now*. Before I met this Jesus fellow, I was known as Simon the Fisherman. I was minding my own business one day, fishing by the sea, when he comes up and tells me that my name is no longer Simon the Fisherman but Peter. I was a little perturbed at the timing of this re-naming because I, literally, had *just* made 500 business cards with "Simon the Fisherman" on them! But that's neither here nor there...

What's important is that my name is now Peter. You know what that means? It means "Rock." Now, there are two competing theories as to why Jesus decided to call me "Rock." One is that I am usually as stubborn as one. The other is that Jesus is going to use me as the Rock of his Church (or something like that - I wasn't paying much attention because I was still pretty miffed about the whole business card thing).

Anyways, truth be told, the whole fisherman thing wasn't working out so well for me. I was looking for different waters, so to speak. So it was funny that this Jesus fellow came along and told me that he was going to make me a "fisher of people," whatever the heck *that* means. So, I figured, what have I got to lose? I, therefore, agreed to follow this guy because there was just something about him (or, more accurately, something *within me*) that told me I should follow him.

So I did. And, boy, what a journey it's been. Pretty much, I've been doing about everything that is *not* in a fisherman's job description. I've followed him and we've cleansed a leper, healed a paralyzed man, and then cured another person with a withered hand. Needless to say, these were things that I did *not* learn in fisherman's university!

Then Jesus told us a bunch of parables that I'm still trying to fathom. After that, we went on a boat ride (which I was very glad to do because, you know, boats are my thing). I thought I was back on comforting waters, waters that I knew and worked and used to make my living. Finally, I thought, I'm back on the water where nothing will surprise me.

But, just as I thought that, a huge storm came and I about soiled my pants (along with the other disciples). But just before things got really out of hand, Jesus spoke and calmed the waters.

Yeah, this guy I'm following is not your average joe. There seems to be something about him that made me think that he was unstoppable. That was, until a few days ago, when he told us that he would have to undergo great suffering and be rejected and killed (and then something about being raised on the third day but I didn't really pay attention to that part because of the absurdity of the previous statements).

All the sudden, Jesus had us worried. Worried that all of this following and traveling and healing would be for nothing. What's the point of doing all of this for and with someone if that leader is just going to be killed? It didn't make sense. I was beginning to have my doubts. I was beginning to think that I would have been better off staying by the sea and declining this weird dude's proposition to change my name. Change is hard. Change is scary. Change is...well, it's downright exhausting.

Speaking of exhausting, yesterday we decided (or *Jesus* decided, I should say) that we should climb up a mountain. Why, you ask? To pray, he said. Well, if you ask my humble opinion, the bottom of a mountain is a perfectly fine place to pray but apparently Jesus wanted to pray on *top* of it so we did what we've been doing all along - we followed him.

When I say "we," I mean me and my two new-found friends, James and John, who were just as confused as me as to why Jesus wanted to climb this mountain to pray.

So we got up early, had breakfast, and began climbing the mountain. We made pretty good time - after all, walking is pretty much all we have been doing when we're not healing people or listening to Jesus give more confusing parables.

When we got to the top of the peak, breathless and sweaty, we collapsed on the nearest big rock but Jesus went a little ahead.

Ok, Jesus. Now what? we thought.

And then it happened.

Dazzling white light. It erupted from Jesus' skin or his head or his arms - I couldn't really tell, it was just so darn bright. We would have screamed had we still not been so breathless from our trek up the mountain. We could do nothing but sit - frozen in front of that which we did not understand. I'm not sure what I felt. I suppose, if you had to put a name on it, it was a curious and potent mixture of fear and sheer astonishment.

For a moment, Jesus just stood there, emanating light with his arms outstretched in a benediction-like pose, alone. But after a minute or an hour (I couldn't tell you which), two people appeared next to him, one on either side. One was Elijah and the other was Moses. Don't ask me how I knew but I just did. They stood and spoke with each other, with Jesus in the middle as if he were moderating a debate. But they weren't arguing. They were discussing and reminiscing, as if old friends. Jesus spoke with him as if he had actually been there the hundreds of years ago that Moses and Elijah were, you know...alive!

After awhile, James, John, and I began feeling a little awkward and I decided to step up to the plate and suggest that we sit down and stay awhile; you know...set up some tents or something so we could at least be comfortable. After all, so far I was enjoying this much better than those messy things like exorcisms and healing weird people that we were doing "down there."

So I made the suggestion but was quickly silenced by this big, booming voice that came from the sky. It sounded a lot like the big, booming voice that came from the sky when Jesus was getting baptized. It told me to be quiet and to listen to Jesus. "OK," I said - (I may be stubborn as a rock but I know better than to argue with a big, booming voice shouting from the heavens!).

Then, just as quickly as it began, it ended. Moses and Elijah disappeared and Jesus was just standing there, no longer shining, as if nothing had even happened. Without words, Jesus motioned for us to follow him back down the mountain. I would have described Jesus as casual had it not been for this determined look upon his face, the look you see on someone's face when they have a mission and they know it.

We didn't talk on the way back down; John and James seemed just as flabbergasted as me. I certainly had a lot to think about.

In the time since, I've been thinking a lot about why Moses and Elijah appeared beside Jesus. Why them? After all, there are about a million important people in the Old Testament that could've made a divine appearance next to Jesus during this Transfiguration thingie.

I knew the stories of Moses well. If you haven't heard of him, he was this really insecure guy who was called by God to help him free the Israelites from their captivity at the hands of Egyptians. Moses was called to free, to proclaim, to lead. He certainly had his troubles; the Israelites were, after all, professional whiners. His wilderness journey with the Israelites was a tough journey but God saw him (and the Israelites) through it.

I also knew the stories of Elijah well. If Moses represented the Law of God, then Elijah represented the prophets. There was no prophet greater than Elijah. He said some pretty unpopular things about following God, and taking care of those who were less fortunate than you, and some other things that other people did not particularly receive with the most graciousness. Elijah was persecuted and ridiculed, but God protected him and saw him through it.

I still am not sure what I think I know about yesterday's events up on that mountain. But one phrase sticks in my mind: *Jesus was in good company with Moses and Elijah*. If I had any doubts about whether this Jesus guy was doing the work of God with God's seal of approval, they had been extinguished. I now knew that Jesus was called to something, something special, and something that was bigger and more important than me.

If Jesus was in the company of people like Moses and Elijah then I believe I can make the following assumptions about the journey ahead.

First of all, since Moses and Elijah both knew persecution and opposition for their messages, I have a sneaky feeling that not all (or even much at all) of what we are about to do is going to be well received by the masses. But I think we'll be fine (as long as Jesus doesn't do anything crazy like turning over tables in the Temple or something!).

Secondly, since Moses and Elijah both went on long journeys, I feel like whatever journey lies ahead will be one that I can't predict. And you know what that does, it pushes me out of my comfort zone. I don't particularly like that but, you know, so far this whole discipleship thing hasn't been too comfortable, anyway. Don't get me wrong; there's no place I'd rather be but, that being said, it isn't always a cake walk.

Thirdly, since Moses and Elijah both were vindicated by God after long and difficult journeys, I believe - for some reason - that whatever lies at the end of the journey will be...what's the word for it..."good" doesn't quite do it. Maybe "lively" is the better word. Yeah, that's it - lively! Moses and Elijah both knew hardship and even death, but God's "lively" plan had the final word.

I hope to God this Jesus guy knows what he's doing because he's talking like he's going to die! I don't want to believe it. I can't believe it! Not now. Not yet. Maybe there will be a day that I understand what he's saying. But until then, I just have to trust that where we are going is going to end up in life and not death.

You know how sometimes when you go through something exciting and perhaps even a little traumatic, you sometimes remember things that you hadn't remembered before. Well, I just remembered something that I had forgotten since yesterday...

When we turned to head down off that mountain, I could make a city out way off in the distance. It was Jerusalem. Because we were walking up the mountain, I hadn't noticed it before because I never thought to look behind me. But now Jerusalem was no longer behind us but before us. Before we headed up the mountain, Jesus said something about us going to Jerusalem. And, trust me, whatever he said didn't sound positive to me. Something about a cross, something about being rejected, and dying.

I feel as though we are beginning a long journey. What will be on the other side? I don't know but I know we'll find out together.

Well, one thing's for sure: we're not going to find out by sitting here. I guess we better get going.