

Title: Follow the Morning Star

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, may your son be the bright morning star in our hearts and minds, transfiguring us to live the good and moral life; based in love, may our lives bring the world to Christ Jesus, your son, through whom we pray. Amen.

Charles Swindoll tells a funny story about a nine-year-old named Danny who came bursting out of Sunday school like a wild stallion. His eyes were darting in every direction as he tried to locate either mom or dad. Finally, after a quick search, he grabbed his Daddy by the leg and yelled, “Man, that story of Moses and all those people crossing the Red Sea was great!” His father looked down, smiled, and asked the boy to tell him about it.

“Well, the Israelites got out of Egypt, but Pharaoh and his army chased after them. So, the Jews ran as fast as they could until they got to the Red Sea. The Egyptian Army was getting closer and closer. So, Moses got on his walkie-talkie and told the Israeli Air Force to bomb the Egyptians. While that was happening, the Israeli Navy built a pontoon bridge so the people could cross over. And they made it!”

By now the dad was shocked. “Is *that* the way they taught you the story?”

Danny admitted, “Well, no, not exactly, but if I told you the way they told it to us, you’d never believe it.”

With childlike innocence the little guy put his finger on the pulse of our sophisticated adult world where cool skepticism reigns supreme. It’s more popular to operate in the black-and-white world of facts...and, of course, to leave no space for the miraculous.

The account of the Transfiguration is also a miraculous story. Do we accept the story of the eyewitnesses or do we believe that they were dreaming or made the story up to move the Jesus narrative along? Of course, the curious thing is that they did not to share with anyone what they saw and heard. Obviously, they eventually did share the story, likely after the resurrection when the Transfiguration made more sense to them.

In the second letter attributed to St. Peter, Peter believes that he will die soon and Peter has a bucket list. Peter has things he needs written down so that the people receiving this letter will be able to refer to it in the future and be spiritually fed. Peter’s other agenda is for his readers to stay faithful and morally pure.

In this letter, Peter relates only one experience that he had while he was with Jesus and that is the Transfiguration. Of all the things Peter saw while he was with Jesus, Peter writes about the Transfiguration – not the resurrection, not the feeding of the 5,000, not

the last supper, no, none of those events and especially not Peter's denials. The focus of Peter's instruction to the church is the Transfiguration.

Peter says that what the apostles related of their experiences with Jesus are true. They didn't make that stuff up. Certainly, upon hearing about Jesus' miracles and healing stories the hearers might think that it is all fiction. Those stories are remarkable, but I think Jesus did those things either to highlight his teachings or he did them out of compassion. The good news of Christ is centered on the events of Holy Week, though the other stories are also edifying.

Many, many people have written about the nature of Christ. We recently went through the second search for the historical Jesus. The nature of Christ was debated in the early church for centuries before a resolution was achieved with the adoption of the Nicene Creed and the acceptance of the Apostle's Creed. However, those creeds did not stop the debate about the nature of Christ. Today, the nature of Christ is the subject of academic inquiry.

I think what Peter is trying to relate is that though Jesus appeared as any human being, Jesus was much more than that. The proof of the pudding is the Transfiguration. If Jesus was something more than a regular human being, then those stories of his miracles are not really all that extraordinary.

Jesus took with him his inner circle of Peter, James, and John to the top of a holy mountain. Neither Peter nor the gospel writers identify the mountain. Tradition has the place being Mt. Tabor. There is a plain west of the Sea of Galilee. It is very fertile. On this plain is a mountain that stands all by itself with no other peak for miles around. That is Mt. Tabor. So it seems that since this is the only mountain of note in the Galilee area, that must be the place of the Transfiguration.

On this mountain, Jesus' appearance changes. He becomes so bright that it hurt the eyes of the three apostles looking at him. Jesus talks to two others. Peter wants to respond, preserve, and honor the occasion. Peter offers to build three booths. After saying this, the gospel writers note that Peter didn't know what he was saying. Peter cannot contain God. Jesus has taken on the appearance of God and Peter wants to lock it up. Peter didn't mention his faux pas in his letter.

Then comes a cloud that frightens the apostles. There was a presence there that was too wonderful and great for them to understand. Their flight or fight response was triggered, but they did neither.

Then out of the cloud came the voice, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (2 Peter 1:17b, NRSV) Peter says that all three of them heard the voice say those words. Jesus was not just preaching the word of God. The Word of God was speaking through the cloud. Peter is emphasizing that Jesus' words are to be trusted as being the words of God.

Peter tells his readers that they will be better off if they pay attention to the apostles. When all is dark and there is no visible path, Jesus will be our light. Jesus will lift our hearts like the morning star lifts the sun into view.

Then Peter gives us a warning. No one person can solely interpret scripture. The reason is really quite simple. Prophecy does not come from human beings. Prophecy does come from people inspired by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the word of God can only be understood in community.

I can tell you that the Bible says such and such, but without community, it is meaningless. So how does community work with a blow hard preacher? I cannot speak for others, but what I do is read what others say about the passages I preach. I also have some training and education about the scriptures. Seminary learning is done in community.

In Anglicanism, we do theology through the lens of scripture, tradition, and reason. We read and interpret scripture keeping in mind what the church has said about scripture over the centuries and with our own God given intellect. I also believe that we are guided by the Holy Spirit in this process. But what Peter cautions us, is that we can confuse what we hear in our minds with our own agendas, mistaking our agendas with the Holy Spirit. It takes a community to sort that out.

That's why Bible studies are so valuable. Somewhere in the mix of discussion, the Holy Spirit thrives. A simple test of the Holy Spirit is this: if we receive a spiritual insight and it is consistent with the Bible, then it is likely from the Holy Spirit. It will resonate with the love story known as the Bible. If a preacher or anyone else preaches hate, it is not from the Holy Spirit. Hate is the antithesis of Jesus' teachings.

Peter is not trying to make us feel good because we are loved. Peter is saying that love dictates our actions and behaviors. Scripture enlightens us and gives us light: a lamp in the dark, the breaking of dawn, and the morning star. May these lights also transfigure us.

God's words on the mountain are for us. Just as God transfigures Jesus, Jesus' words are to transfigure us. If we truly listen to Jesus' words, how will we be transfigured? What will we change about our lives?

Text: 2 Peter 1:13–21 (NRSV)

¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body,^h to refresh your memory,¹⁴ since I know that my deathⁱ will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

^h Gk *tent*#

ⁱ Gk *the putting off of my tent*

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.

¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved,^j with whom I am well pleased.” ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹ So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, ²¹ because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.^k

^j Other ancient authorities read *my beloved Son*

^k Other ancient authorities read *but moved by the Holy Spirit saints of God spoke*

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (2 Peter 1:13–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.