

**An EXEGESIS—EB13 choir**  
**February 25, 2018**  
**The Second Sunday in Lent**

**For Faith Sharing—Gospel: Mark 9:2-10**

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.

Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, "**This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.**"

Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them. As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

**SCRIPTURAL NOTE:** To understand today's Gospel we need to put it into context. Peter had just, in the name of the other disciples, recognized their Teacher, Jesus, as the expected Messiah of Israel. "**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.**" But this was immediately followed by **Jesus clearly telling them exactly what being Messiah was going to mean for him.** Far from being a mighty warrior-king who would crush all the enemies of God's people, he was going to be rejected by the leaders of his own people, arrested, tried, condemned, tortured and eventually executed, not by them, but by the much hated enemies they expected the Messiah to overthrow.

This was too much for Peter and he objected strongly. In turn, he was severely scolded for getting in the way of God's way of doing things. Even more, Jesus had said that, if anyone wanted to be his follower, then they would have to be prepared to walk the same road of rejection, oppression and even death. **What Jesus had said was totally against all they had ever heard about the expected Messiah.** They were in a depressed mood on this day. **To give a boost to their morale,** to help them see that the way of Jesus would lead to victory and triumph, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a high mountain. As the disciples watched, Jesus was suddenly **transformed** (in Greek, *metamorphoo*), a rare word in the NT, from which our English word 'metamorphosis' comes). "*His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzlingly white.*" [Barclay, Matthew, 156-163]

- 1. Question:** Given the scriptural note above, why do you think that Jesus took his chosen disciples up to this mountain of Transfiguration near Caesarea Philippi?
- 2. Question:** What is our natural inclination when we are faced with a big opportunity or decision? What is the lesson for us?
- 3. Question.** What is the real reason why the vision of Moses and Elijah, the prophets, came to Jesus on the mountain? What do you think was the topic of their conversation with Jesus?
- 4. Question:** Why did Jesus' clothing become dazzling white?
- 5. Question:** Was Jesus telling us that he was replacing Moses and Elijah?
- 6. Question:** Why do you think the Mountain of the Transfiguration is given to us?
- 7. Question:** Why is the fact that **Jesus comes down** from this glorious mountain experience important for us?

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**Q1. Luke gives us a clue** about Jesus' purpose in bringing his men here. In Luke 9:29. He says that **Jesus was praying**. Why? For what was he praying? What greater question had Jesus to solve before he set out for his last exodus to Jerusalem? In Luke a mountain is always a place for Jesus' to pray. After satisfying himself that his men recognized him for who and what he was, he had an even greater question than that to solve before he set out for his last journey. He had to **make certain that it was indeed God's will that he should go up to the Cross**. Jesus went up to Mount Hermon to listen to the voice of God. He took no step without consulting his Father.

**Q2** One of the supreme differences between Jesus and us is that Jesus always asked: "What does God wish me to do?" **We nearly always ask: "What do I wish to do?"** Jesus had no will but the will of God. When he had a problem, he did not seek to solve it only by the power of his own thought; he took it to the lonely place and to God. [Barclay, Matthew, 158]

**Q3.** Moses and Elijah both had intimate experiences of God on a mountain top. Moses received the tables of the law on Mount Sinai. Elijah found God not in the wind, or in the earthquake, but in the still small voice in a cave on the mountain. Luke 9:31 tells us that **Moses and Elijah both spoke to Jesus of his exodus to Jerusalem and death**. Moses and Elijah, the twin peaks of Jewish history, came to Jesus and **told him to go on. Their presence indicates their total endorsement of all that Jesus is doing**. Jesus is the natural continuation of their Jewish tradition. Therefore, the disciples need have no misgivings about anything they have heard from Jesus about his coming destiny. [Barclay, Matt, 160]

**Q4.** Transfiguration literally means **to change figure or form**. Jesus' appearance was changed. To his terrified disciples, Jesus must have looked like an angel. Some scholars say this is Mark's resurrection story, the only resurrection picture we have in this Gospel because the risen Jesus doesn't appear at the end of Mark's story. But here on the mountain, **Jesus appears in blazing light in a dream-like space** talking with those who lived centuries before. Transfiguration Sunday marks an in-between space for us — between Epiphany, which began with the journey of the magi, and Lent, which begins Jesus' journey to the cross. Some call this in-between state **a liminal space**, from a word meaning **"threshold."** A liminal state is characterized by **ambiguity** and openness.

There's often **a sense of disorientation**. Where am I? Perhaps you've had that sense after waking suddenly from a dream where you've been talking with loved ones who have died. Where am I? No wonder Peter didn't know what to do! He wanted to build three dwellings, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. He wanted to hold this moment forever, **to capture Jesus' dazzling brightness**, to make sure Moses and Elijah didn't get away.

But before Peter could finish talking, **a cloud overshadowed the disciples**. They remembered stories from their ancestors — **the cloud resting on the mountain as a sign God's presence in the wilderness**. Then a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." As suddenly as the vision came, Moses and Elijah were gone and Jesus stood alone, looking as he had when these three fishermen saw him for the first time.

**Q5.** Was the sun shining at a certain angle on the mountain — like the sun turning office windows to gold in the city at sunset? We can look at this story from several different angles. From one angle some claim that Jesus replaced Moses and Elijah. When the disciples looked up, the Old Testament heroes were gone and the disciples saw only Jesus. But look from a different angle: Moses and Elijah were confirming that Jesus was on the right path. **Jesus**

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**didn't replace them. He incarnated the mission of Moses the law-giver and Elijah, first of the prophets.** Jesus was personally entering human history in order to complete God's saving plan of redemption. [Barbara K Lundblad at [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mark-9-2-9-visions-on-the-mountain\\_b\\_1277385](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mark-9-2-9-visions-on-the-mountain_b_1277385)]

**Q6.** The mountain of Transfiguration is always more enjoyable than the demands of daily ministry or the Way of the Cross. **But the Transfiguration is given to us only to provide strength for the daily ministry and to enable us to walk the way of the Cross.** [Barclay, Matthew, 163]

**Q7.** Jesus takes his disciples with him *up* the mountain, THEN after the period of revelation, transformation, and transfiguration, **they come back down again.** Think of it: Jesus *could* have stayed there. Perhaps he *should* have stayed there. After all, this transfigured state, attended by Moses, Elijah, and his three disciples, was much closer to the state of glory that Jesus deserved than what's coming. **Yet he comes back down.**

Down. Down into the mundane nature of everyday life. Down into the nitty-gritty details of misunderstanding, squabbling, disbelieving disciples. Down into the religious and political quarrels of the day. Down into the jealousies and rivals both petty and gigantic that color our relationships. Down into the poverty and pain that are part and parcel of our life in this world. Down. Jesus came down.

**Why is this important?** At least two reasons: **First, because I think it gets at the heart of the gospel,** Mark's and, truth be told, that of the whole New Testament. As Paul sings, "though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil. 2:6-7). Jesus' downward movement from his rightful place in glory **to embrace our lot and life out of love is,** in a very real sense, the essence the gospel.

**Second, and just as importantly,** I also have a hunch that, deep down, **most of us think Jesus is a little too good for us.** That, truth be told, our job is to try our darnedest to become more like him. While that's a good impulse on one level, on another it can prevent us from being honest. Because no matter how hard we try to be like Jesus -- to be, that is, perfect -- **we know that we fall dreadfully short.** As a consequence, we may feel that the most broken parts of our lives are the ones that keep us from being like Jesus and therefore are the farthest things from him.

But this isn't a story about *our* going *up*, **it's a story about Jesus coming down, all the way down into our brokenness, fear, disappointment, and loss.** And, of course, it only gets more so, as we will soon watch our Lord travel **to the cross,** there embracing all that is hard, difficult, and even despicable in life in order to wrest victory from death itself that we might live in hope knowing that wherever we may go, Christ has already been and that where Christ is now we will one day be.

So maybe the task this week, Working Preacher, is to invite our people into a moment or two of **candid contemplation about what is dark and fearful in their lives.** You will know how best to do this, whether with a moment or two of silence, a rite of confession, or a chance to write down what is most frightful and frightening to us. (And, given that this theme is

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coloring next week's reading, it may be enough simply to alert people to think about these things throughout the week.)

However you engage your people, know that we do so not to dwell in the dark places of our lives, but in order to **assure and remind each other that Jesus is already there**. That Jesus is not afraid of what is difficult in our lives. **That Jesus will not reject us on account of our failings**. Jesus' descent back down the mountain reminds us that we don't have to hide the hard parts of our lives from the God we know in Jesus. For God the Father came to us in and through the Incarnate Son precisely to be with us and for us through thick and thin and through life and death -- indeed, **God came in Jesus to be with us through death into new life**.

So trusting the mercy of **the One who came down the mountain -- the One who entered the dark places of the world** and still seeks out the dark places of our lives -- trusting this One, perhaps we will be honest enough **to name what is broken and hurting in our lives and world and thereby fear it a little less**. For no other reason was Jesus born, lived, died and was raised again, except that we might know that **God is unrelentingly and indefatigably for us!** Thanks be to God. [David Lose at <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1563>]



The Transfiguration, Luca Giordano, Uffizi.it