

Transfiguration Sunday

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Introduction

Jesus takes his closest disciples to the top of a high mountain where they witness the presence of Elijah and Moses and the “transfiguration”.

Peter responds to this momentous occasion by suggesting they build three booths, but before he can finish, a voice from the heavens calls with the deepest affirmation of Jesus’ identity: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Text

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Eli jah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli jah.” He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead.”

Comment

The Transfiguration story provides us with a rich array of imagery and opportunity for interpretation. There are already a variety of readings from and into the text, but as we look at the story through the lens of conflict I hope we can find a glimmer of grace.

Throughout the Gospels Jesus continually displays his purpose and being through words and action— every event a parable of its own. In the Transfiguration text Jesus moves from the “open secret” of his identity to explicitly reveal who he is

(and his relationship with the Father) to those closest to him.

Some see this as the revelation of Jesus as God, for others this is the moment Jesus is the fulfilment of the Jewish faith. One reading sees the rejection of Peter's desire to build shelters/booths as an anti-capitalist stance. Still others read this as Jesus' "coming out" – the opportunity to explicitly reveal his truest identity to his closest friends.

Oscar Romero highlights every character in this pericope (apart from Jesus) is marked by violence in some shape or form, and Peter's 'violence' is still to come...

*"Moses killed an Egyptian;
Elijah put to the sword
the prophets who did not adore the true God;
Peter drew his sword against Malchus to defend Christ;
James and John begged Christ to rain fire
on a town that would not give him lodging."
Jesus is revealed amongst and to the violent.*

When I read this story, however, I am struck by Peter's seeming inability to fully comprehend the vision before him (however one chooses to interpret it). He is Martha, when Jesus is hoping for a Mary.

"He was still speaking when..."

Peter is interrupted. Whatever insight he is to possess in the future had slipped through his grasp in that moment. The voice in the cloud causes Peter, James and John to fall on their faces in awe.

How often do we feel like Peter– trying to respond, but not always getting it right?

There are transfigurations and opportunities for transfigurations about us every day. May we be open to acknowledge and receive these moments as they transform us.

When we fail, may we be reminded, as Henri Nouwen holds– the words "my beloved" are gloriously inclusive; as they are spoken about Jesus, they are spoken to us, and to all we encounter.

"Rise, and have no fear"

Response

Can you remember a time when you have been vulnerable with close friends/colleagues?

How can we create space for others to tell their stories; to celebrate and reverence

them?

What character do we need to develop as peacemakers in the world?

Prayer

Jesus, who revealed himself to his closest friends:
May we be blessed with true friendships,
And may we be a blessing as true friends.
May we recognize those we encounter as beloved,
Reminded of our own divinity in and through these moments.
May we perceive the glimmer of grace that illuminates, allowing the radiance of
transfiguration to transform us all.
And may we return, again and again to the knowing that we, too, are beloved.

Season: Ordinary time

Themes: