

SECOND READING: Luke 9:28-36

pg 69 OT

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 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. 33 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. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 36 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.

FIRST READING: 2 Cor 3:12- 4:2

pg 180 NT

12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. 14 But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. 15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; 16 but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

“Forever Changed”

“It humbles me and brings out the best in me. It breaks and heals me all at the same time. I meet Christ every time I go.” Rev. Linda McCarty said these words to me as I was contemplating going on a medical mission trip to Guatemala with the agency, Faith in Practice, of which she now serves as the Executive Director. *“It humbles me and brings out the best in me. It breaks and heals me all at the same time. I meet Christ every time I go”*. I have since discovered that these words are similar to others that people use to describe the change that happens to them when they fully encounter the Christ. It’s what is being described in this story, I believe, this glorious story in the 9th chapter of Luke, the story known as the Transfiguration.

Barbara Brown Taylor calls it a “luminous story, a luminous story of a mystical encounter, not only between God and God’s Beloved but also between God’s Beloved and those who watch”.¹ Of course, there are scholars, and I am grateful for them, scholars who find inherent symbolism, who read between the lines and offer interpretations as the primary purpose of this somewhat unique and confounding story. One interpretation that seems very compelling, is that Jesus went up the mountain in order to prepare himself for his coming exodus, his departure, his death. He went through the mountain-top experience, knowing that it was preparing him to follow where the law and the prophets (here represented by Moses and Elijah) had pointed, (i.e. to the valley where the son of man will be handed over to sinners).² This and other interpretations are very valid. But the mysterious and luminous REVELATION of the fully divine nature of Jesus, should not be overlooked as also a purpose of story in and of itself...the revelation to and its consequences on those, then and now, who watch.

I’ll use Barbara Brown Taylor’s words in retelling the story from the vantage of the disciples...As we were praying with Jesus, suddenly he was *“standing there in front of us pulsing with light, leaking light everywhere. Face like a flame. Clothes dazzling white. Then, as if that weren’t enough, two other people were there with him too, all of them standing in that*

¹Barbara Brown Taylor. *“The Bright Cloud of Unknowing.”* <http://day1.org/5560-the-bright-cloud-of-unknowing-print>. (accessed 2/28/19).

²Tom Wright. *“Luke for Everyone”* (Louisville: WJKP;2001,2004),115.

same bright light. Who were they? Couldn't be. Moses? Elijah? Dead men come back to life! God's own glory, lighting up the night.....Now they're leaving. Oh, but Peter's trying to say something. 'Tents', he's saying. 'We need tents.' He thinks we are on Sinai. Someone tell him we're not on Sinai. (His instincts are good. He knows that we are in the presence of The Presence and he wants us to stay here together). Now there is a cloud coming in fast that is way more than weather, a terrifying cloud that is also alive. Cutting Peter off. Covering everything up. Smells like a lightning strike. Can't see a thing. Then a voice from the cloud is lifting the hairs on the back of our necks. Fear so fast and primitive, we're bristling like dogs. What is the voice saying? Not 'listen to me' but 'listen to him'. 'Listen to Him'. The Son, the Beloved. But listen to what? He isn't saying anything, not now anyway. He is shining. Or at least he has been. Now he isn't. Now it is over. He is alone again.....Now what?''³

At the conclusion of the description of the Transfiguration, Luke simply says, “*And they kept silent, and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.*” It's been said that if the disciples had told anyone about the THINGS they'd seen, they'd have been rushed off to a psychiatrist or more likely their tale would be chalked up to bad food they'd eaten the night before.⁴ But, in Matthew's gospel it says that Jesus instructed the disciples to say nothing of what they'd seen and heard until after his resurrection. In either case, the disciples kept quiet, but that is not to say they were not affected. The disciples had encountered the Divine. They'd woken up to who this Jesus really was. If they'd had any doubt before, they now knew this rabbi whom they followed was the Son of the living God. And they were affected by it. How could they not be?

Brothers and sisters, when we have been in the presence of the Presence, when God has seemed so close and God's love tangibly real and powerful, the scales fall off our eyes and we see things in a different way. How can we not? It can be terrifying and always humbling but yet life giving. As Linda McCarty said, we feel as though we are broken and healed at the same time.

³Barbara Brown Taylor.

⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor.

French philosopher and mystic, Simone Weil, had a moment of glory, an experience she called it, when she was listening to a magnificent Gregorian chant at a Catholic mass. She wrote, *“We live in a world of unreality and dreams. And to give up our imaginary position as the center of the universe in the imaginative part of our souls is to awaken to what is real and what is eternal. A transformation takes place at the very roots of our existence. It is the transformation analogous to that which might take place at dusk on a road when we suddenly discern as a tree what we first had thought was a stooping man. When we realize that what we thought was the rustling of leaves was really the whispering of voices.”*⁵ What she is describing is the change which happens when we wake up to what is true about not only God but ourselves. What we THINK we know about ourselves is now rearranged. And when this happens there becomes room for more divine movement in us. Tom Wright says it this way, *“We are correct to be wary for these [experiences] are never given for their own sake, but so that we may be equipped by them and God can use us within his needy world.”*⁶

The lectionary reading this week is vss. 8 – 36, but in brackets, vss. 37 – 43 are also included. And this is because they not really part of the Transfiguration story per se, but yet they are. They are a continuum of it. Listen for God’s word....

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. 38 Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. 39 Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. 40 I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." 41 Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." 42 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. 43 And all were astounded at the greatness of God

Jesus healed the boy, and those around him believed, but his frustration with the disciples showed that the Transfiguration wasn’t meant as a private experience, one that would remain up on the mountain. It was meant for his disciples to carry down into the world where there’s

⁵Simone Weil. Quoted in JoAnna Adams, “Changed” http://morningsidepc.com/archive/www.morningsidepc.org/dfc/newsdetail_2/1200137.html (accepted 2/28/19).

⁶Tom Wright.

confusion, violence and pain, where there is injustice and fear, where there is hunger and thirst.

It was meant to change and equip them so they could shine Christ's love into the world, to transfigure it! What were the words of that hymn we sang today (words reflected in the 1st reading)? "*As we gaze on your kingly brightness, So our faces display your likeness, Ever changing from glory to glory, Mirrored here may our lives tell your story, Shine on me, shine on me.*"⁷

Once I got on site in Guatemala, I spotted her. She was a tall, slender, blonde, young woman who slipped in and out of the exam or triage rooms with ease as she translated for the native people and interacted with the medical staff. I watched frightened, hurting patients light up as she'd pull her chair up next to them in the waiting room and talk to them as she'd play with their children. I soon learned that she was with an American social work team who was stationed in Guatemala, and that she was on a year-long mission experience. I'd not interacted with her until she came to me one afternoon with several prescriptions. As the Team's pharmacist as well as chaplain, I was concerned to see that they were for her, and that they were for potent antibiotic and antiparasitic drugs. When I spoke with her about them, she told me she was well aware of the rough side effects since she'd been taking them for several months. "What I've got," she said, "just doesn't seem to go away." Later I asked the prescribing physician how she could have contracted such serious infections, and he explained that she had chosen to live with the people who had come from the outlying villages and were either waiting for their surgery dates or facing the long lines each day for outpatient medical or dental care in the village clinics. She did this to help ease their fears and help them through the processes. He felt she'd certainly caught her infections or was being repeatedly reinfected in the harsh living conditions. I was taken back, completely undone. I'd seen the camps, the make-shift dormitories and primitive food preparation areasbut yet I was also seeing this young woman, light leaking out of her everywhere, as she loved on the Poor of Guatemala, all the

⁷Graham Kendrick. "Shine, Jesus, Shine" https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&rlz=1C1CHZL_enUS708US708&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=lyrics+of+Shine+Jesus+Shine&* (accessed 2/24/17).

while suffering with illness herself. Oh yes, I was humbled. I was broken and healed all at the same time. I met Christ in her.

Friends, on the Mount of Transfiguration, a voice from the clouds said, *“This is my Son, the Chosen One, “Listen to him.” “Listen to him”*. These are the words of life. Remember them as this week we leave the season of Epiphany and move into the season of Lent. Remember them as we head to our own mountaintops to pray. Remember them. For when we do listen, when we *“Listen to Him”*, his light will leak out on us, his shininess will rub off on us, and we will be changed. We will be forever changed...changed to then “go and change”... to leave the mountain and change our world. *“Listen to him”* May it be so. Amen.