

Way Out (3Mar19) Luke9:28-45

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. A rather particular word, transfiguration, and one that we have zero occasion to use outside of this story.

Interestingly, the Greek word would be more familiar than this englished-up Latin version. The Greek original is *metamorphosis*. That one you do use other places, like for the monarch caterpillars we raise and release from church as transformed butterflies.

But just as I'm getting you familiar with the Greek word and concept in this story, I'm going to take it away. Mark and Matthew say metamorphosis, translated as transfiguration. But Luke's version of the story, if you give a careful look, doesn't include that word.

Instead there's *another* Greek word that you'll know plenty well in English. When Jesus is talking about his departure, which he was soon to accomplish at Jerusalem, that word for departure or way out is exodus. That's a term you know from...? The Bible! The book of Exodus! God's people being liberated from slavery in Egypt, release from captivity, deliverance, salvation through the parted Red Sea waves.

It may hint that this is less personal transformation in Luke's Gospel and more communal deliverance. But for the divine discussion of *this* exodus, let's wait a moment while we notice some other aspects.

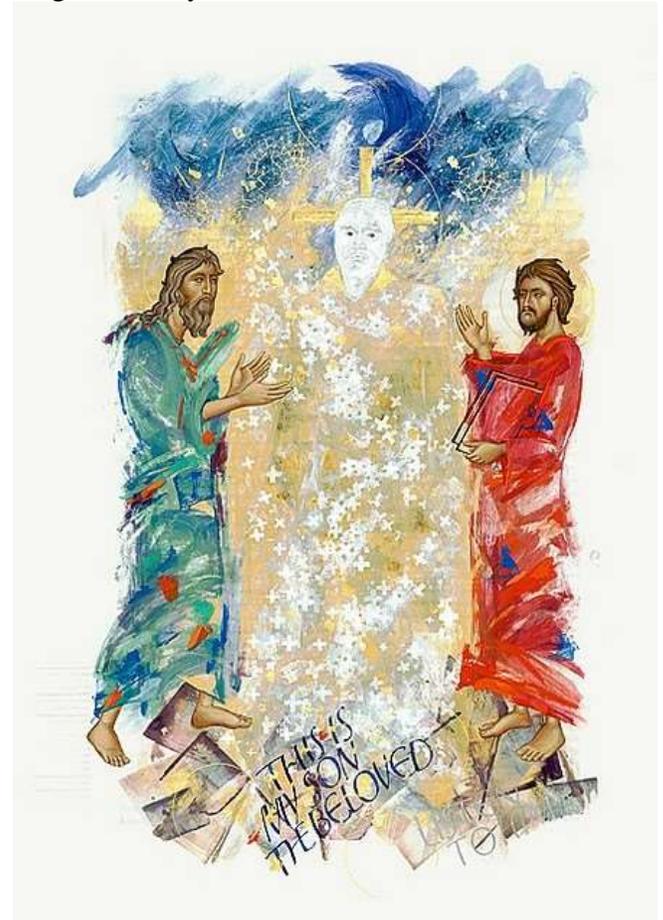
This story of a dazzling glowy shiny Jesus marks the end of our season of Epiphany, a season about showing forth the identity of Jesus. We may say that this story gives his full, true identity, that when we look at Jesus, we are seeing God. That was even in our Prayer of the Day, that his face shows us God's glory.

This vision appears to be certainly a big deal. Indeed, it may even be more stunning than Easter; at the end of the Gospel on the Emmaus Road, two disciples are walking along with resurrected Jesus who is talking about entering his glory, but he must look fairly normal then, because they sure aren't exclaiming "Holy Moses and Great Gallopin' Elijah, you're all glowy and shiny and

dazzling and quite a heavenly sight!" In other words, even on Easter, Jesus doesn't look *this* good. Maybe it's because he just stepped out of his grave and had been through a rough few days. Though we ought to say it's impossible, there's something in this story that is more marvelous than resurrection.

This is so spectacular, so majestic, so otherworldly, so overwhelming that Peter doesn't know what to do about it. I like the line where it declares essentially "He blathered on incoherently, because he didn't know what he was talking about." As if to reinforce that, God kind of interrupts him with a voice coming out of the enveloping cloud.

It makes some sense that Peter didn't have a clue, though, because we can't possibly either. Your bulletin picture is one representation, but really how would we begin to describe or portray what this is with Jesus? It's more than movie magic. It's beyond us.



The best we might say is this is a vision, maybe even like in a dream (including the stuff about being asleep or awake). It fits with our religious pursuits and hopes, for a grand revelatory vision, to be able to see God's glory, to discuss our big questions face-to-face, to have it all bright and clear, to have a voice from heaven tell us what we need to know.

With much more we could ponder or consider, that's the first half the story.

And I'd say the second part is another type of where we go looking for God's glorious presence. It's a showy story, full of dramatic action, the phenomenal power of the Holy Spirit over demonic unclean spirits, of a boy receiving a miracle and a family restored. When other options had failed, Jesus showed up and fixed the situation. There's miraculous healing, and a sense of good triumphing over bad, that we'd cheer for, just as we'd hope. Indeed, afterward it says everybody was astounded and talking with amazement about God's greatness.

Again, much more that could be pondered there, but to step back:

We've got two big aspects of where we go looking for God with high expectations and yearning, with major flamboyance and anticipation for the Creator of the universe, healer of our every ill, savior of the world, potentate of all potential. We've got a vision and a miracle. Both longings seem to pan out in amazing, remarkable ways, exceeding any possible desires.

But the thing is that Jesus doesn't really seem to point to either of those things. They're there. Maybe they tell us something about him, reveal for us a connection to God. But Jesus isn't focused on marquee marvelous mind-blowing displays of splendor.

As the crowd is still all abuzz with hubbub about the miracle, Jesus quietly points someplace very unexpected. This is sort of as if somebody in a luxurious gown walking out on the red carpet with an Oscar trophy from the Academy Awards last Sunday had said, "Pardon me, I'm going to catch a cab for my shift volunteering at the nursing home." Or like an athlete about to be

sprayed with champagne after the championship quietly ducking out saying, "I've gotta go make supper for my kids."

But Jesus is a notch more. He's just performed wonders of two sorts, godly stuff, a big deal, front page news in the old Palestinian papers, if they'd had them, or trending on ancient Twitter.

But instead of basking in that fame, while the crowds are still roaring their approval, Jesus does a 180 and quietly mutters, "Let these words sink into your ears: [I am] going to be betrayed into human hands." Not so much of God conquering all. Instead of acclamation and applause that celebrated God's work in healing and restoration, this part is met with confusion, lack of understanding, with concealed meaning instead of revelation, and so little perception of what he was talking about as to leave them afraid. Betrayal?!

And yet this is also the same thing that started the story up on the mountain top in the first part. Before Peter wakes up and begins babbling on in excitement about the dazzling light show, actually the conversation was less glorious than we'd expect. The heavenly messengers, Moses and Elijah, not only the epitome characters of the Hebrew scriptures but two people in Jewish belief who were said not to have died, these two who came directly with God's authority, were talking with Jesus about his departure, his exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

That sounds like it could be a grand finale, a last big performance. But this conversation is about putting God's stamp on Jesus heading toward betrayal, arrest, conviction, execution, death. His departure is the cross. He is set on going to Jerusalem to die.

Both the first and second part of this reading today point us to that. There may be voices that speak to us from the clouds and visionary moments and the so-called mountain-top experiences, but they are not the clearest place to look for God. There may be miracles, healing from injury and the deepest longings of a family for restoration, more amazing than the community could expect, and those may be our clearest yearnings and places we want God to be working.

That is what we think of power and might. But those rare phenomena are not the clearest place to look for God.

To look for God, we look to the vulnerability of the cross. We look to Jesus' death in Jerusalem. That is the central revelation. And we may not like it. It may not follow our expectations. It may leave us babbling or confused or afraid. It may even leave us dejected that we didn't get more, didn't get our money's worth. We may have wanted bigger and better and the typical glitz and eminent reputation. We may think of Lent as a sullen sidestory from the main show. But instead, even now and always, we look to the cross.

And that brings us back to the word exodus. Jesus discusses the exodus in Jerusalem. On a cross, departing from life in this world, is how God chooses to release us from captivity, to free us from bondage, to proclaim liberty, to deliver us from all that would enslave us. That is the way out. That is what brings salvation, from all evil forces, from the power of empire, from what would threaten community, from our own false hopes as well as from our failings and fear and desperation. A way out.

We aren't only waiting for the flashy or fabulous moments for God to show up. It's not only with things seem hunky dory, but through our confusion and captivity, through our struggles and sorrows. That is also where God's saving work in Jesus is present, leading through death to glorious new life. That his death conquers death is what makes it glorious. And so in every moment we can shout, sing, praise God unending with our Alleluias, now and forever.