

That Transfigures You and Me

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Matthew 17:1-9

¹ Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.

² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking,

suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."

⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Last year, when I thought I was getting a tax refund,

I hired a trainer

I am stronger and healthier,

but I've fallen far short of transfiguration I'd hoped for.

I take comfort in knowing that that is pretty human.

to feel we aren't quite who would prefer to be

or whom others would look more favorably upon.

From the outside, others seem to me
quite perfect, but for the rest of us,
Our face, our physique, our health, our thoughts, our vices,
our income, our relationships, our lives
aren't exactly what we dreamt of as children

Its okay, I tell myself.

We're doing fine.

But there's a nagging feeling

Is there a better version of me I've not truly realized;
a parallel world in which all hopes were fulfilled

And how about the church of Jesus Christ,

Boy, that started off amazing, didn't it?

With stars and angels and wise men and shepherds
And a baby in a manger.

And now comes the desert and demons and the disciples
and the healing and the teaching
and the crucifixion and the resurrection.

That was just 33 years.

But as we look at the last 2000 years,

We cannot even count the ways Christ's church has
fallen short, if not broken the promise
of those early days.

Oh we've had our moments:

when those Bonhoeffer and those German pastors stood
against the Nazi's

Or those slaves who persevered with faith, in bondage
and led one another to freedom
or this congregation in days past,
when our numbers were huge
in the days when nothing but church
happened on Sundays
and youth group was the only game in town

Glory days...

So we can have sympathy with Peter when he
stumbles on this heavenly moment
the unfathomable beauty of the meeting of
Moses and Elijah and Jesus

Moses - the one who brought the people out of slavery
into the promised land.

Elijah, the beloved prophet whose body was carried
right up into heaven at death
and
Jesus, The Messiah, the promised One.

*This is place is good for us, says Peter!
Let's stay!*

He so longs for this glorious fleeting moment
to be permanent; to stay in this parallel world
so perfect compared to what awaits them below.

Then, scripture says, while Peter is speaking,
A bright cloud overshadows them

*(Isn't that wonderful, A bright cloud? That casts
a shadow? I don't even know what that means!)*

... from which the voice of God speaks

*This is my Son, the Beloved,
with him I am well pleased.*

LISTEN TO HIM!

Peter and James collapse in awe and fear,
then feel Jesus touch them

Rise, do not be afraid

Elijah, Moses have vanished.

Jesus' once shining face and dazzling clothes
are now just his normal face and
ordinary clothes.

And they follow him back down the mountain
to a life of love and service

Transfiguration -

Witnessing the divine nature of Jesus,
and the bright cloud of God
is not to turn us, the disciples,
away from our lives,
but back toward them.

Back to these bodies, less than glowing,
to this body of believers
as imperfect as we are
this very body is the Christ
this very land, the holy land.

We don't have to go back to the days of the martyrs

to be part of the powerful witness of Jesus:
to the least of these:
those who struggle with mental health, and
poverty and addiction,
they are right here with us.

We don't have to go back to those
stood against Hitler or faced down the firehoses outside
Mississippi courthouses,
but their shining example can help us see our own,
how we are called to stand with the persecuted
of Uganda, as we are now, particularly with Pastor
Fred's wife Rosette, in prison, and their children
Precious Promise Priscilla and Prosper

And in this country, where the social fabric is being torn apart
more and more every day,
we at Maple Grove are being called to
weave a community where
difference is welcomed.

God's glory, that is, God's love made visible in Jesus,
is transfiguring you and me.
We are being made perfect,
in the only way that matters to God
made perfect in love.

We are being reformed, reshaped, transfigured by the love.

All through February, we have been singing the songs of faith
from the African American community.

Today, we end this month with a song written by an
Abolitionist Christian, Julia Ward Howe, in 1861,
The Battle Hymn of the Republic

The melody was one of a popular song of protest,
but she felt that a deeper hymn was required
in the midst of that great battle for the soul of the nation

Her words in the first line were the last ones spoken in public

By Dr. King in 1968:

*Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord.
Glory, Glory, Halleluiah.*

Rev. King could not stay on that mountaintop,
in the presence of glory

no more than Peter and James and John could stay,
They all had to follow Jesus back down the mountain

And into their lives

and so do we.

To use these bodies, these short years

this blessed community

to reflect God's glory

that is God's perfect love.

That truth, that light, that love is ever marching

Ever transfiguring....

Glory, Glory, Halleluiah.