

Exodus 34:29-35

Metamorphosis

Luke 9:28-36

March 2, 2025

Every good thing that happens on earth is a glimpse of eternity. The trick is to learn how to see. Today is Transfiguration Day in the scheme of things, the last Sunday before the beginning of the season of Lent. Tuesday is, well, Fat Tuesday, Mardi Gras. We will gather for our traditional pancake supper. Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. The next six weeks is meant to help us focus our attention on the descent of Jesus and his entourage into Jerusalem for the fateful Passover festival at which the Passion of Christ would occur.

The central irony of the Bible and its message is that the two controlling narratives are the decline and fall of the Israelite civilization, and the origins of the Christian Faith centered in the crucifixion of Jesus, so that one can make a solid case that the Bible derives its relevance not only from an attempt to find meaning in the good things that happen, but also the bad things, and not only in the bad things that happen, but in the worst things.

Is it possible to say, as a companion to the statement that began these remarks about every good thing, that in view of God's redemption, every *bad* thing that happens is a glimpse of eternity? The trick is to learn how to see?

The Transfiguration itself refers to the time when Jesus led Peter, James, and John up onto a mountain and was transfigured before them. Literally the term is a translation of a Greek term that looks very much like a more contemporary word, "metamorphosis." It is like in Geology, the three kinds of rock; sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic, that last of which refers to rocks that are changed from their original form after being subjected to high heat or pressure, or a combination of the two.

One might think of the twelfth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans,

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship (sometimes this phrase is translated, "reasonable service," same original words, different English words). Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind."

This transformation is a metamorphosis, just as the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain before Peter, James, and John, was also a metamorphosis. One gets the impression that as Jesus was headed to the catastrophe before him, knowing that it would also be catastrophic for his followers, he gifted them by revealing a glimpse of what was on the other side, the way things really are, as a way of helping them through it.

The story is familiar. The countenance of Jesus was changed, his garments became like lightning, and two Old Testament figures joined him; Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets. There was glorious splendor, and they spoke with each other about his departure.

Peter misinterpreted the whole situation and offered to build three houses, one for each of them, as if they were going to remain forever in that place. Luke goes out of his way to say that Peter did not know what he was saying. Then there was a cloud and they heard a voice that said something very similar to what Jesus heard at his baptism,

“This is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him.”

And the episode was complete. They found themselves alone with Jesus. They kept it a secret.

Each person must decide for themselves how to interpret this metamorphosis. I am going to assume that believers would accept that this event did in fact happen. It went beyond the more run-of-the-mill experiences that are a part of everyday life for most of us. It was a remarkable event. Perhaps we might say a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence.

The companion text for the day from the Old Testament deserves some attention. In it, we read about that part of the wilderness experience when Moses was receiving the Torah. He would ascend the mountain to speak with the Lord, and when he

returned, he was radiant with the divine splendor, so he veiled his face when he was with the people down in the encampment.

One can see the connection between the transfigured Jesus and the radiant Moses. There are and have been what must be called, “religious,” experiences that are so extraordinary that there is no ordinary way to speak of them. Such is the kind of experience that Transfiguration Day is meant to represent. It *may be* on a much smaller scale, most all of us, before we are done, will have some story to tell about similar experiences in our own lives.

Perhaps not, but in lieu of what might be our own experiences of transcendence, we have these biblical stories to guide our path, to help to see. It is in the wisdom of the church that Transfiguration Day is the last Sunday before Lent.

Like the reflections about the resurrection last week, the Transfiguration grounds us in God’s magnificence as we head into Lent, a time of humble thoughtfulness and repentance, and attention given to the meaning of the cross of Jesus, which is the most earthly *and* most heavenly representation of God that we have. Let us think not only of the before Lent Transfiguration, but as we will do when we share Communion, of the after Lent transfigured Jesus on the cross.

And then in humble gratitude, we come upon the following question, *what kind of person shall we be?*

At the first, Peter and James and John kept all this private like the veil over the face of Moses to protect the people, but eventually they told it. Peter himself mentioned it in his second letter, and perhaps his thoughts can serve us today if we listen to them as the final words before we observe the Lord's Supper together. Listen to a few excerpts from the Petrine correspondence:

“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written, ‘be holy, because I am holy.’

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers and sisters, love one another deeply and from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

“ . . . Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness knowledge; and to knowledge self-control; and to self-control perseverance; and to perseverance godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love.”

Let us be people of holiness and love, both of which come to us only as grace like a blessed dream, but which we are called by God to pursue nonetheless. Let us think of these transcendent moments even when we could choose to think of other, more difficult experiences and hardships.

Let us rejoice with others when they have stories to tell of their own experiences, and let us seek to accept the gift of grace that enables us to see, to make our way through life healthy, whole, with graciousness and joy, and hope.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)