

Transfiguration of Our Lord

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Exodus 34:27-35, Psalm 99, 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2, Luke 9:28-43a

### **Changed From Glory into Glory**

*Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven to earth come down!  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;  
Visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.*

*Breathe, oh, breathe thy loving Spirit into every troubled breast;  
let us all in thee inherit; let us find thy promised rest.  
Take away the love of sinning; Alpha and Omega be;  
End of faith as its being, set our hearts at liberty.*

[Today, called the Transfiguration of Our Lord, is, in the church year, the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany - the season of the Father revealing to us the glory of his Son, at once fully divine and fully human. Today we see Jesus, together with Peter and John and James, going up on a mountain to pray. And there Jesus is “transfigured.” ]

*And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white.*

And suddenly talking with Jesus were two ancient figures, Moses, to whom, on a mountain, was entrusted with the Ten Commandments and Elijah, prophet of the Lord, who, fleeing for his life, hid in a cave on a mountain after publicly naming the gross transgressions and idol worship of King Ahab and the evil deeds of his wife, Jezebel, who had ordered the killing of the prophets of the Lord. It was there that he heard the still small voice, the sound of sheer silence calling him to rise up and continue his prophetic ministry

[Moses, Elijah, and Jesus] *appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem*

His departure... [The word “departure” in the Greek , the first language in which our New Testament was written, is the same word for “exodus.”] For the Hebrew people living centuries before, it was the absolutely pivotal moment in which God made a way for them to escape from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. For Jesus the exodus would be his suffering and death on the cross, through which God would make a way for all the world to be set free from bondage, set free from its slavery to all the false, deceitful gods that wreck our lives, that wreck our relationships with each other, that destroy our communities and God’s good creation, and yes, would wreck the very hope for justice and civility and righteousness in a nation.

Jesus’ death on the cross was God taking on to himself all the suffering and barbarism, all the personal and sometimes government-sanctioned use of power to crush our very souls. In the words of scripture, Jesus became sin who knew no sin. Jesus’ departure, his exodus thus made possible our freedom, made possible our liberation from all the evil soul-destroying, community-destroying powers of this world.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul put it this way: *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* (Romans 6:3-4) Do you not know? Do you not know that when you were baptized into Jesus’ death, into Jesus’ exodus, you were set free, free every day for the rest of your life to walk in newness of life?

Listen now to these words from our Second Reading:

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Since then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness...all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.*

In the hybrid Bible Study this past Tuesday, we reflected on the glory Peter, John, and James witnessed when they looked at Jesus, at his face, his dazzling white clothing and at the two men standing with him. They saw his glory!

This is Jesus who on the day of his baptism [which we celebrated on the first Sunday in Epiphany], while he was praying, *the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him...And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."* And now on this day of the transfiguration *a cloud came and overshadowed them*, enveloping Jesus and his disciples and *from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!"*

During the Bible study I began to see my fellow participants a little differently. I saw all of them as "exodus" sons and daughters of God, as honest, open and freed, fully human children of God. [In our shared reflections on the Word, I saw them, in my mind if not with my physical eyes, being changed, with new insights, new understandings, moving from one degree of glory to another.]

[I shared with them my father's blessing to me one night just before his death, these words from Numbers 6:24-26: *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*]

And now I see you, all of you made in the image of God, each of you in your own distinctive way reflecting the glory of God; all of you by the grace of God being transformed from one degree of glory to another. This glory is the gift of the Holy Spirit freely given in and through you every day of your life, a life lived in words and deeds of love, until at last you and I see Jesus face to face in all his shining glory.

This glory is the freedom to walk more and more in newness of life, a freedom to trust that Jesus meant it when in your baptism into his death, he was calling you and equipping you, to become a good listener, listening to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit in your very soul, gently calling and equipping you day by day to love appropriately everyone whom God brings into your mind, everyone whom God lays on your heart.

But I have a confession. I don't always listen very well, either to that quiet, gentle voice of the Spirit within me or the words of inspired wisdom coming from my sisters and brothers. So, I am very grateful for God's patience.

I know I'm not alone in my failure to listen. Peter, John, and James didn't do so hot at listening either, even after just hearing that commanding voice from the cloud: *This is my Son, listen to him!* On the very next day, after coming down from the mountain they, with Jesus, encounter a father whose son, his only child, was critically and dangerously ill. He had asked the disciples for help. The 12 disciples, including the three with Jesus on the mountain, had earlier been empowered by Jesus to have authority over all demons and to cure diseases. And they had been incredibly successful.

But they grew lax in their calling. They apparently forgot to listen both to the Spirit's voice within them and to the father's urgent plea for help. The father of the little boy said, "I begged your disciples to cast out the demon, but they could not."

Jesus is clearly frustrated, giving his disciples a holy balling out: *"You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?"* But then moving on from his frustration, he said to the father, *"Bring your son here."* ...Jesus in a sign of what he would do for whole world on the cross *healed the boy and gave him back to his father.*

Some days we too will forget to listen. And Jesus will at times be frustrated with us. But we are still and always will be his beloved sisters and brothers. By the wonderful gift and presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, Jesus will remind us again and again that throughout the course of our lives we are becoming more and more like him, growing from one shining, grateful, joyful degree of glory to another expression of glory.

*Come, Almighty, to deliver, let us all thy life receive;  
Suddenly return, and never, never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,  
Pray and praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.*

*Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee!  
Changed from glory into glory, till in heav'n we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise!*

Amen

JDS