

This is a high holy day for the Christian Church, like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost. In some ways, the story of Jesus transfigured on the mountain top is a pre-view of Easter... Jesus in a resurrected body, a glorified body. Amazing! We can only *imagine* what it must have been like: Jesus face and body so infused with divine light and energy that he was shining (As the song says, “Shine, Jesus Shine!”). Even his clothing seemed to sparkle with light!

We can only imagine. Or maybe not... maybe we *have* seen at glimpses of such radiance... in people here on earth! I’ll never forget the face of a Romanian monk who lived in the same dorm with me at Princeton Seminary. Yes, an Easter Orthodox monk, on some kind of student visa with us. His face almost literally glowed! We know that spiritual intuitives speak of seeing “auras” around people; Many paintings depict saints with halos. Well, Father “Pop” could have been destined for sainthood in my view, for he was simply radiant, and seemed to be in good humor all the time. He probably prayed and meditated many times a day!

We spoke last week of exceptional people, who appear to take the High Road of self-giving love... like St. Francis, and others who are not even Christian... like the Buddhists Thich Nhat Hahn and the Dalai Lama; people travel for miles to just sit in their presence. Probably *they* meditate many times a day. Our story of Jesus this morning relates one very important point... that Jesus did not just *suddenly* shine on a mountain top with his close disciples... the Luke version says that *while He was praying*, he began to shine!

Folks, it is not a small thing that we sing and pray a lot in worship, and singing we know is like praying twice. We become vessels (or channels) of the divine presence we are singing about. Musicians become channels or vessels of energy from beyond them. Sure, some music and lyrics can be negative even evil, but I

think it fair to say that beautiful music comes from heavenly places and angels, from the beauty of God. We are blessed this morning with beautiful music that comes from beyond; it draws *us* to connect with the Divine spirit beyond! Next weekend we have an band straight from Ireland; the music they offer gets everyone moving and tapping their toes, one form of praise and joy. Friday night, for early Mardi Gras, I heard a New Orleans style jazz band, playing “When the Saints come Marching in, ... and yes, it did get many onto the dance floor!

So there are many ways to experience glory... beauty, light, and radiance, joy. *However...* there is another important part of our Jesus in glory on the mountain top story. Yes, he was praying. But the topic of his prayer is mentioned: he was praying *about his departure*. He was praying about the fate that awaited him. He was talking with Moses and Elijah about the suffering and sacrifice that is part of spiritual calling... They also knew it well; they had been persecuted also in their prophetic lives. Jesus knew that he had to go back down the mountain, back to a world full of woe and conflict. Jesus knew that facing the powers of this world would lead to more persecution even death.

I’ll never forget the title of a sermon I heard as a young adult: Look *down* for Jesus! (We can’t just dwell on the Jesus of the heavens, the Jesus of radiant light, but how are we finding Jesus in the everyday affairs of life). How are we seeing peacemaking happen? How are we seeing the central part of the Lord’s Prayer happen? (“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”). How are we seeing conflicts addressed with honest sharing, with truth-telling, so that some insight for a good resolution can happen. While we admit that international wars are very different from interpersonal conflicts, Oh how we can pray that

world leaders would take into consideration the needs of both warring parties, rather than follow the primitive way of “might makes right” and let the larger and more powerful nations *dictate* the terms of settlement to smaller nations. When “we look down,” or look around, on earth for Jesus, we look at so many areas that need courage, that in our work may give us just glimpses of glory, glimpses of progress toward the peaceable kingdom the Bible speaks of.

Paul’s words in 2Corinthians 3, we are “transformed from one degree of glory to another” speak very clearly about our journey in life, especially our life in Christ, being one of gradual transformation. We may have our *moments* of seeing or being people with radiance, radiating love and peace and truth, but our progress on this path surely has its ups and downs... hopefully two steps forward and one step back... not one step forward and two steps back! We are indeed “earthen vessels,” making occasional trips to mountain-top experiences, but spending most of our lives in alternating hills and valleys.

I also will never forget a slide presentation I saw, again when I was a young adult, in college. One student leader showed slides of many famous people and heroes of our world... but then the closing slides were of images of Jesus, even Jesus hanging on a cross. I assume the slides started with Jesus the Good Shepherd, Jesus the healer of sick, images of Jesus’ love for children, etc. But the closing slides were of Jesus love from the Cross.

There was a song we sang in my college Christian fellowship days that sort of sums up the reality of Transfiguration that necessitates Transformation, the coming down from mountain top. Opening verses are like the Transfiguration... “Have you ever looked at a sunset” (with the sky mellowing red)... then I say you’ve seen

Jesus my Lord. And “Have you ever stood by the ocean (felt its thundering motion)... then I say you’ve seen Jesus my Lord. (In retrospect, I often thought, “Yuck, that’s not very true... anyone can enjoy a sunset or an ocean!) But a good search engine found me that song from the 70’s. And Lo and behold, the 3rd verse does round out the picture... of a deeper glory: “Have you ever looked at the cross, with a man hanging in pain, and the look of love in His eyes”.. then I say, you’ve seen Jesus my Lord.

So... we all as followers of Jesus, Paul affirms that we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. This is not continual radiance or mountain-top joy. But it is truly transformation, and that involves growing pains, arrivals and departures, hills and valleys. Transformation involves coming down from the mountaintops, from high holy-days such as Christmas, Easter, and Transfiguration... to the daily work, even suffering love, forgiving love that Jesus taught. That is the reason for the 4 weeks of Advent and our 6 weeks of Lent coming up, seasons of preparation and self-examination of our daily lives... pondering, meditating on our journey in life, and our journey of faith.

Transformation involves progress, not always completion; In God’s work, there is always more to do, always some work left undone... as Jesus surely did not complete his work in Palestine that still has continual war. But the good news is of course that Jesus promised to walk with us and strengthen us, encourage us with his inner light. Jesus promised that we can carry His light in our hearts and be like “lamps” on a hillside, even “little lights,” to brighten the corner where we are... May it be so.
Amen.