



SAINT LUKE'S

"THE CALLING"

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

EXODUS 34:29-35

PSALM 99

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-42

LUKE 9:28-43

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

MARCH 3, 2019

Today I invite us to enter Jesus' transfiguration through the door of the Collect. The Collect "collects" the themes of the day:

O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

The Collect frames the transfiguration of Jesus through a sequence of prayers. First, we are to look with the eyes of faith deeply into Jesus' face. Since childhood I have wondered – like you I am sure – what Jesus actually looked like. Jesus had a real, not idealized, human face. Maybe he had some missing teeth and the ones he had weren't perfectly straight. Jesus' real life face and his whole body are filled with *light* as he communes with God's messengers Moses and Elijah from ages past. Seeing Jesus filled with light, we are strengthened – inspired, renewed - to bear our Cross, the Collect prays. But transfiguration doesn't stop there, with strength to persevere. The next step is that *we* are changed into Jesus' likeness. *We* are changed from glory to glory, in a transfiguration of our own. Not all of our transfiguration is deferred until the next life. There is a process of transfiguration in us, extending through Jesus to you and to me. This is a remarkable promise: we too can move more and more into God's life, day by day.

The disciples do not understand this at first. Peter wants to memorialize and crystallize the moment in booths. We might build a shrine or a basilica. Peter's instinct is to keep the place set apart as a spiritual re-fueling station. Jesus does not endorse that impulse. Jesus doesn't directly address it, but as Peter is still speaking the Divine cloud overshadows them as if to say: Hush. Stop talking. Just listen. The point of transfiguration is not to freeze that moment but take it with you. Take the Divine light down the mountain into the valleys of life.

Jesus and the disciples return to the valley with a jolt. In Luke we have an immediate follow-up story of a healing, an exorcism.¹ The church gives us the option of skipping this bit of today's gospel, but I think it is important because it puts transfiguration into practice. What we see is the transfiguration of a tormented soul. Exorcism is the essence of the gospel good news: fear, sickness and isolation are cast out by a greater Power, bringing healing, love, and peace. Jesus "gives the boy back to his father" – this is part of the healing. We are restored to our loved ones. We are restored to relationship with God and others. Through this healing of this child, Jesus shows us what transfiguration is: wholeness and freedom, no longer at the mercy of destructive forces within or outside us. Transfiguration is God's promise to us, day by day and moment by moment.

¹ Matthew (Mt. 17:9 f.) and Mark (Mk. 9:9f.) both insert a theological disputation about Elijah's return before their healing stories

Have you ever had a transfiguration experience, when it felt as though suddenly you were flooded with light? I suspect many of you have. I suspect also that many of you keep those experiences to yourself. I suspect we keep these experiences to ourselves for several reasons. Maybe we find that it is hard to find the right words; or that what we have experienced doesn't seem to fit neatly with standard church teaching -it is too "out of the box". Transfiguration moments are sacred. Like Peter's sense of holy ground on the mountain, they are moments we want to return to. Those transfiguration experiences are certainly hard to describe, yet they are often turning points in our lives, and in our journey with God.

Perhaps you have had an experience of profound clarity, or affirmation, or courage. Or perhaps of a disproportionate joy, a transfiguration of gratitude and thanksgiving. This is the holy ground of your life.

What have been your transfiguration moments *so far* in your life? And what were those moments given to you "for"?

Jesus is transfigured *for* something, not only to make a theological point about his divinity. Luke only² tells us that Moses and Elijah talk with Jesus about Jesus' departure (literally: his exodus). The

² Matthew 17:1-8 and Mark 9:2-8 do not mention the subject matter of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah

³ Luke 9:44, 51

Exodus is the primary liberation event in the Hebrew tradition, freeing the people of Israel from slavery and initiating their journey to the Promised Land. It is both exit and new birth. On that mountain, Jesus becomes able to see not only behind but ahead of him. After the transfiguration, Luke tells us Jesus *set his face* to go to Jerusalem.³ We don't know how Jesus himself experiences his own transfiguration. We do know that the transfiguration marks his turning towards Jerusalem and the Cross, and to new birth for humanity.

Where are your transfiguration moments leading you now? St. Ignatius speaks of the “more” of the spiritual life. *More* is the decision that brings “more” of you into God's service in the world. Transfiguration experiences invite us to show up more in our lives and for the world. What is the “more” God is calling forth from you? Where is God calling you to offer more of who you are to those around you?

O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.

³ Luke 9:44, 51

THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
487 HUDSON STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEB SITE: WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG

EMAIL: INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG