

## **‘TRANSFIGURED?’**

**Exodus 24: 12-18; Matthew 17: 1-9**

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. To the modern mind, this is like a ghost story. It’s like an unbelievable, other worldly story. It is like a fable that can never be true.

Yet this story is a very important piece of the puzzle about who Jesus is and what Jesus is about. Jesus and three of the disciples go up on the mountain top where he is transfigured right before them. Right there in front of them this event occurred.

And if that was not enough Moses and Elijah appear. Right in front of us is the Who’s Who of biblical tradition. The Old and the New. Those before and those after. What we had done and what the future will be.

It was literally and spiritually a mountain top experience. And it clearly is a picture of who and what this Jesus is.

Moses and Elijah represent the past. Moses had led the Israelite people through the Wilderness. They had claimed the Promised Land. God’s promises to them had been fulfilled. Moses had obtained the law in the Ten Commandments and

represented that anchor in the Jewish faith.

Elijah, the prophet, was the last prophet in the Old Testament. It was thought that he would return to commission the coming Messiah. He would forth tell about the Messiah and pass along the great promises of God.

So, you have the complete heritage of the Jewish faith up on the mountain: Moses and Elijah. Everything the Jewish people held to as important and central.

And then there is Jesus and the three disciples. The pass off to the future is occurring on this mountain. It is the reality that the Kingdom of God will

come into reality. It was an ominous experience. It had never happened before. It was the dawning of a new world and a new future.

And if you have any question of the significance of this occasion, read verse 5, “A voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him.’” Do these words ring a familiar sound? They are the same words which were said at the baptism of Jesus.

In other words, God is blessing the mountain top experience. God is authenticating what is happening. God is saying, “This is for real.” He, Jesus, is

the Messiah. He is my Son: listen to him!

In other words, he is the one to whom you listen. He will guide you. He will provide the way. He is the salvation.

Which is all well and good...until Peter blew it! On this mountain top, in this unbelievable experience, Peter tries to be helpful. Verse 4, Peter declares, “it is good for us to be here, if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you (Jesus), one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” To which Jesus gave no response.

But isn't Peter just like you and me? Regardless of the experience - - whether

secular or sacred? We want to ‘box it up’ and save it. We want to ruminate about the mountain top experience so it will never go away.

And it does make some sense. When you have had an incredible retreat experience, you hunger for more. And you would like to bottle it up and keep it. When you have the trip of the lifetime, you want to hold on to it even weeks later. That's why we take so many pictures so we can remember what occurred. We do not want to lose that sensational experience.

Peter figured if he could make a booth for Jesus and Moses and Elijah, they would always have them. They

would know where they are. They would go and visit and have another mountain top experience, so they thought.

Yet, when you think about it, isn't that idolatry? Isn't it calling us to worship the event versus the Spirit they exuded? Isn't it a bit too much to let Jesus and Moses and Elijah be stuck in that one experience which we have had?

Which happens to many of us. Often times the Jesus we worship is the Jesus we knew or remember as a child. "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so!" The Jesus we worshipped as a child is the meek and mild Jesus lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling cloths.

Often, we build our dwelling for Jesus as being in that manger complete with cattle and sheep and shepherds.

I think the Transfiguration story is really a story for all of us. It is a story about how Jesus changes. No longer a baby, but a man on a crusade to save the world. On a crusade to bring in the Kingdom of God. On a crusade that unfairly jeopardized persons get a new lease on life as well as a new life.

In addition, the setting of the Transfiguration Story is significant. In chapter 16, verse 21, Jesus declares for the first time that he must suffer, be killed, and on the third day be raised. Of

course, good old Peter rebuked Jesus saying this should never happen! To which Jesus replied, “Get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block to me!”

Jesus then declares what it means to follow him. Verse 21, “Deny yourself take up your cross and follow me.” I am intrigued the location of these two stories. For Jesus goes up the mountain, is transfigured, and begins to live out and demonstrate what it means to take up one’s cross.

As they were coming off the mountain, the disciples were scared to death. Jesus said, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

With that they looked up and saw no one but Jesus! Their fantasy about Moses and Elijah had disappeared and they only beheld Jesus. The old was gone. The new was here. The old ways are over. The new ways are beginning. What they thought was true was now found in a man who declared to them to take up their cross.

And then the next story coming off the mountain was not to take a break, but instead, Jesus healed the man’s son who had leprosy. The boy was brought to Jesus and was healed instantly. Action, taking up the cross, doing God’s work.

Part of the message is that the Transfiguration Story makes no sense until you come down into the valley. Until you get off that mountain top and begin to do what you have been talking about. It is not about an emotional experience that is uplifting as much as an experience that makes a difference in other people's lives.

Taking up your cross and following Jesus. Let's talk about that. Roger Gench in his commentary on Matthew 17 gives me a new insight into the meaning of taking up our cross. We believe "our cross" consists of the burdens which we carry. My cross to bear is my husband or

my wife. My cross to bear is my child. It is my job. It is that nagging relative who I cannot stand but after all we are kinfolk! Yet remember what cross Jesus had to bear. He provides the example of what it means to bear our cross.

I think the cross Jesus had to bear was the sin of the world. He drug that cross to Calvary and hung on it to wipe away every tear from the human soul. He carried the entire world on his back in that cross. He suffered for all humanity.

While we are not Jesus - - just want all of us to be clear about that fact! We do have crosses to bear. As Roger Gench says, the cross is concerned about the

unfair practices and dilemmas people find themselves in. The Cross is about how people are treated unjust and unfairly.

The Cross is about the ways in which the world treats people unjustly. Like...

- the senseless killings that happen daily in our county.

- children going to bed hungry at night in our community.

- ridiculing of women in our society and in the workplace including the unfair prejudice against them.

- the clash of races - white, black, brown, yellow – and how we avoid dealing with those issues even when we declare everyone is a child of God.

- the economic disadvantage people have in our society and we are the upper class economically in our economy.

- the poor housing or lack of housing for persons.

- the educational system that treats some with favoritism instead of fairness.

- the abuse that occurs in families.

- the trafficking of young teenage girls.

I think we could develop as many issues as there are people. Yet to think we can solve all of them is impossible by one person or by one congregation. Yet I think taking up my cross is a burden on my soul which I cannot ignore. Jesus

could not ignore the travesty of the sin in the world. Taking up my cross is a passion which I have. It is something I want to spend a good bit of time on. It is my calling.

It is not some personal suffering which I endure. It is not a Pity Party for me. No, the cross is for someone else. My cross is my passion to try and free someone from the unjust ways of this world. It is my little attempt to make a difference in someone else's life. It is a desire to be for another person or situation. It's my cross to bear.

Remember Jesus: he had passion for others. It was not about him. The

Transfiguration was an eternal statement that he would be who God had called him to be, 'My Son, the Beloved.' He would be the savior of the world. So, listen to him!

What is your cross to bear? Where is your passion? Who do you hope to assist against the devastating issues of our day? How is God using you for God's sake?

OR do you just want to build booths and remember the good old days? Get up and do not be afraid. You do not bear this cross alone!