

Luke 9:28-36; Daniel 7.9-10,13-14; 2 Peter 1:16-19  
6<sup>th</sup> August 2017 – The Transfiguration

*Enable us, our Father, to respond to the grace of your Word with humility of heart and in the spirit of love; that our lives may be conformed more and more to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The Transfiguration – recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels - has been interpreted in many ways. Some have read it as an account of the Resurrection, brought forward for literary effect. Some say it should really only be understood in a symbolic way that points toward future glory. And some say it should be taken seriously as an actual event, but one that indicates other events beyond itself.

The gospel writers are not helpful here as they really are quite inconsistent. Saints Matthew & Mark tell us that Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain but they don't tell us why. They do tell us that Jesus was completely transformed. Luke emphasizes that Jesus went up the mountain to pray and distinguishes between the changing appearance of his face and the shining radiance of his clothing “[And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.](#)” (Luke 9.29).

Mark's disciples call Jesus “Rabbi”; Matthew's call him “Lord”; and Luke's call him “Master”. Only St. Luke includes the conversation with Moses & Elijah – the “exodus” (*Greek, meaning 'going out'*) that would be accomplished in Jerusalem – and it's Luke's version that is used for the church feast we celebrate today. It's his details that offer a guide to the story and to the importance of its position here for everything else that follows.

Prayer is the governing context. We know, don't we, how accustomed to prayer Jesus was, especially before significant events. After his baptism and before his public ministry, before choosing his disciples, and just before his arrest, Jesus goes up a mountain and precedes these events with prayers to his Father (Luke 4.1-4, 6.12, 22.39-46).

It's worth taking a moment to think about why Jesus needed to do this, because we're bumping up against one of the mysteries of the Holy Trinity here. There is only one God, but Jesus laid aside his omniscience when he became human at Bethlehem. He needed to consult in prayer with his Father as to whether he, Jesus, was doing what his Father wanted and not deluding himself to his own ends. Fervent prayer brought him the answer then – as it still can for us today.

Jesus' prayers take place in close dialogue with the tradition of law and prophecy – Moses and Elijah are present as advisers and points of reference in the great liberation of God's people from their enslavement to sin. Jesus places himself in continuity with this tradition as he enters the cloud that envelops all three figures. From the cloud, Jesus is acknowledged by a voice that names him as “...my Son, my Chosen” and when the cloud lifts, Jesus is alone. From here on, divine authority rests on him, not because the law and the prophets no longer count, but because they are gathered up and fulfilled in what Jesus is about to do.

It is striking that the writer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter of Peter chooses the transfiguration rather than the resurrection as the guarantee of glory to faithful believers at the end of time, but he/she leaves out Moses & Elijah to concentrate on the glory

of God the Father conferred on Jesus Christ. Dorothy Lee (*The Transfiguration*, Colloquium 2004) notices elements of Daniel's apocalyptic vision (7.9-10, 13-14) and the epiphany, but she doesn't think Peter's letter a sneak preview of the end times, rather a statement of hope.

Lee's key observation for me is, however, the capacity of the transfiguration to evoke a sense of beauty. For Luke, this is focused on Jesus' face, radiant on the mountain, but also the magnetic centre of further Lukan events: when his face is set towards Jerusalem (9.29), almost kissed by Judas (22.47), turned to Peter, after his triple betrayal (22.61), unrecognized by the disciples walking to Emmaus, until associated with the breaking of bread (24.31), and a source of fear and joy after the resurrection.

The disciples last vision of Jesus' face comes as he is carried up to heaven in the act of blessing them (24.50-51). The spiritual writer, Janet Morley, has written a prayer with which I'll close – it's now included in CW as the post-communion prayer for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Trinity. In it, she captures something of the simultaneous longing to experience the beauty of God in Jesus Christ, alongside the sheer terror of encountering something beyond all human powers of imagination,

*O God, whose beauty is beyond our imagining and whose power we cannot comprehend: show us your glory as far as we can grasp it, and shield us from knowing more than we can bear until we may look upon you without fear; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

## **Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14**

### **Judgement before the Ancient One**

<sup>9</sup> As I watched,  
thrones were set in place,  
and an Ancient One\* took his throne;  
his clothing was white as snow,  
and the hair of his head like pure wool;  
his throne was fiery flames,  
and its wheels were burning fire.  
<sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued  
and flowed out from his presence.  
A thousand thousand served him,  
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood  
attending him.  
The court sat in judgement,  
and the books were opened. <sup>13</sup>As I watched in the night  
visions,  
I saw one like a human being\*  
coming with the clouds of heaven.  
And he came to the Ancient One\*  
and was presented before him.  
<sup>14</sup> To him was given dominion  
and glory and kingship,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
that shall not pass away,  
and his kingship is one  
that shall never be destroyed.

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## **2 Peter 1.16-19 - Eyewitnesses of Christ's Glory**

<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup>For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved,\* with whom I am well pleased.' <sup>18</sup>We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.  
<sup>19</sup> So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

## **Luke 9.28-36 - The Transfiguration**

<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus\* took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake,\* they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,\* one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen;\* listen to him!' <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.