

## The Transfiguration of the Lord 2023 Luke 9 vv28 to 36

Today, with three of Jesus' closest disciples – Peter, James, and John – we see the glory of Jesus. We hear a voice from a cloud, the voice of God, claim Jesus as his Son. We know that the scene unfolding before us is showing us Jesus as our God made flesh, confirmation of his divinity. To truly understand the depth of meaning on display today, and to realize its impact on our lives, we must explore more fully this dazzling display of God's glory. We begin with what comes before.

This has been a busy time for Jesus and his disciples. He has sent them out to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal (9:2) – and they “went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere” (9:6). News of this reaches King Herod and he wonders who Jesus is: John the Baptist come back to life? Elijah? One of the other ancient prophets? Everyone seems to be wondering, “Who is Jesus?” He asks his disciples who they think he is and, finally, Peter has a flash of understanding and blurts out, “You are the Messiah of God” (9:20). The Messiah – the one who will redeem Israel from their oppressors – who, at that time, were the Romans.

We and the disciples have listened to Jesus teach...constantly telling us the kingdom of God is here...and we have watched him heal. We have witnessed the feeding of more than 5000 people with just two fish and a few loaves of bread. He has, to our confusion, told us that he must die. The Messiah, die? And yet, at the same time, he said to us, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God” (9:27).

Eight days after this, we witness his transfiguration – we see his glory for a few moments but it will be a glory forever revealed to the world when he fully enters into God’s kingdom after his death and resurrection.

Eight days – Luke knows the significance of eight days...eight sides to most traditional baptismal fonts, the Day of Resurrection (Sunday) being known as the eighth day...Eight – beyond the perfection of seven – indicating the time of the Messiah’s reign in God’s kingdom, the time of the old world fading away and the fullness of God’s kingdom being ushered in. In a few moments of wonder and amazement, the curtain is drawn back and we see the fullness of God’s kingdom dazzling us in the face and clothes of Jesus Christ. We see Moses and Elijah alongside him – two great prophets dwelling with God. Both prophets, in life, had personal relationships with God, had personal encounters with God. These encounters were on mountains.

On a mountain, Moses spent forty days and nights in the presence of God and was given the 10 commandments. On a mountain, Elijah met with God in the stillness of sheer silence. On a mountain, Jesus spends time in the presence of God in prayer and is transfigured before our eyes. Luke frequently makes the point that Jesus spends time in prayer for it *is* in prayer that we enter into God’s presence, form and strengthen our relationship with God, and hear God’s desires for us.

On the mountain top today, we hear the conversation between Jesus and these two great prophets. They are talking about his departure that he is about to accomplish at Jerusalem. The Greek word for “departure” is literally the word “exodus”. Jesus is about to lead a new exodus for his people. The Exodus is the deliverance of God’s people out of the injustice and oppression, greed and

competition, consumerism, all of the brokenness of empire – the ways of the world – deliverance into the healing wholeness of life according to God’s ways...inclusion, love, abundance, and peace.

Jesus will accomplish this exodus – this deliverance out of empire into the wholeness of life in God’s kingdom – through his death and resurrection. Jesus was baptized, the first human receiving the everlasting gift of the Holy Spirit and being claimed as God’s child. He then lived a life of baptismal ministry – teaching, healing, proclaiming the good news before dying on the cross, displaying the perfection of God’s love and forgiveness even while suffering, and then rising to new life fully entering into God’s kingdom, raised in the glory of the resurrection body – the body that will never again die – the glorious body we are given a preview of today.

Jesus was the first. This is our experience as well. In the ancient hymn, the “Te Deum”, we sing that Jesus “opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.” In the mystery of baptism, we participate in his death and resurrection – given the everlasting gift of the Holy Spirit, clothed in the righteousness he displayed in life and in death, made a new creation, living lives of baptismal ministry in God’s kingdom, and awaiting the time when we will fully enter into God’s kingdom, raised to new life in our resurrection bodies.

Peter feels the joy and excitement of experiencing this moment – living in the fullness of God’s kingdom revealed on that mountain top today and he wants it to never end. This is it...this is the kingdom. I want to stay here forever. This is perfection – let’s never leave...Let us build three tents and stay here in this moment for always. Peter wants to bask in the glory and joy and wonder of what

he is experiencing. He wants to frame the moment and keep it that way – like a picture of a happy moment that we frame and put on display in our homes or on our cell phones – our latest cover photo. But life cannot be frozen in time. We can keep mementos of special moments and we can relive and remember special moments but life moves on. Each time we gather together to worship, we are on that mountain top. The curtain is pulled back and we experience the glory of the fullness of the kingdom of God in all of its joy and wonder. But, like Peter, James, and John, we cannot stay here. Life moves on. Even life in the kingdom of God is not a freeze frame moment – it is life to be lived.

Like Peter, James, and John, we are given the reassurance that the fullness of God's kingdom does exist. Its glory is waiting behind the curtain, waiting to be revealed and we are to assist in that revelation. The disciples heard the voice of God and so do we. We may not be terrified, entering into a cloud during our worship, but we are in the presence of Jesus in his glory and we do hear the voice of God. "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (9:35).

The story today ends with silence. The disciples experienced the glory of the fullness of the kingdom of God but "they kept silent and, in those days, told no one any of the things they had seen" (9:36). Why not tell anyone? Jesus does not specifically tell them to keep quiet today but he has very recently given them that exact instruction: tell no one I am the Messiah, he commands them. Tell no one because I must die, rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, murdered on a cross, and on the third day be raised (9:22). The people are not ready to hear this. Even the disciples weren't really ready to hear this. Jesus, the Messiah, is going to die. That's not right. He is going to die at the direction of our leaders.

That's not right. He will be raised to life on the third day. Is that even possible? No...the people are not ready for all of this information. They must first live it to understand it.

Notice that Luke tells us that the disciples told no one about their experience "in those days." They most certainly spoke up after those days when they were ready...when the people were ready. They lived it. They understood it. They proclaimed this amazing event to everyone around. God's kingdom is here. Jesus is the one who has opened this kingdom to us. We've seen it. It's amazing. It *will* come on earth as in heaven. That's where our story picks up. We, like the disciples, are now beyond those days. Jesus has died and has been resurrected. We are now living in the age of the Messiah, living in God's kingdom, heading toward the fullness we saw today, heading toward the fullness we taste each time we gather in worship.

Herod wondered about Jesus' identity. The people wondered, even the disciples wondered. Today we are shown. Today, we are sure. The transfiguration is a dramatic confirmation of Peter's confession – "You are the Messiah of God" – and today we witness a foretaste of the glory awaiting the fullness of God's kingdom. Being sure is not enough. Believing is also acting: This is my Son, the Chosen. Listen to him! We have seen and heard what Jesus teaches and this is to be the blueprint for our lives as well. "Listen to him!" It is a command, a direction for our lives.

Listen to him. Throughout Luke's Gospel, just as today, Jesus encounters God in prayer as I mentioned earlier, and so do we. Prayer is not merely speaking words to God, asking for things, asking most often for the physical healing of friends and

loved ones, hoping God will listen to us, and then we say, "Prayer works." That's not prayer – that's rubbing on the magic lamp and hoping a genie will grant our wishes. God hears our prayers. God can and does heal. But that is not the ultimate point or purpose to prayer – we must be careful not to turn God into the great wonder-working doctor in the sky that we talk to only when we need something. Prayer is seeking the powerful presence of God in our lives.

Prayer is seeking the powerful presence of God in our lives. Getting what we want does not transform us. "Listen to him!" God says. It is in listening, allowing God to guide and direct all that we do, listening and allowing God to lead, it is then that we are transformed – from glory to glory, as Paul says. Particularly, it is in our prayers together during worship that we are formed and transformed, learning how we are to live out our baptismal promises together – as the Body of Christ – learning how we are to strive toward the vision of the glory of God's kingdom that we saw together today. "Listen to him!" There is much to done.