

THE TRANSFIGURATION

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Scripture: Luke 9:28-36 (NLT)

The different prayers that we have done over the past 5-6 weeks have been a blessing, and I believe that today will be the culmination of all those prayers. I didn't expect it to be because the lectionary drew me into this passage as we get ready for Lent.

Luke 9:28-36

²⁸ About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. ³¹ They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

³² Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ³⁴ But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them.

³⁵ Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." ³⁶ When the voice finished, Jesus was there alone. They didn't tell anyone at that time what they had seen."

Heavenly Father, would You take these words and apply it to our hearts under the illumination of Your Holy Spirit's guidance so that we would be able to see what You have for us today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

It is interesting that all three of the synoptic gospels have this particular account of the Transfiguration of Jesus, and all of them follow the question that Jesus asked of the disciples: "But who do you say that I am?" and that revelation that Peter brought, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." But Luke has a very particular emphasis on prayer, which is why I said that it seems to be a culmination of where we are going to be today after the 6 weeks that we spent looking at the different aspects of prayer. Jesus had gone up on the mountain specifically to pray (vs. 28). Neither Matthew nor Luke mentioned that Jesus was praying when the transfiguration occurs. In fact, it is significant that throughout Luke's writings, we see how he makes it a point to talk about prayer.

- ~ Following the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus while He is praying (ch. 3)
- ~ Jesus' selection of the 12 apostles occurs after spending an entire night in prayer (ch. 6)
- ~ Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah occurs in the context of Jesus praying (ch. 9)
- ~ Praying in the garden before His arrest (ch. 22)
- ~ On the cross (ch. 23)

It seems that he takes a lot of pain to show how important prayer was in this journey that Jesus had. Other gospels also talk about prayer and we can see the importance. And yet, Luke seems to make a point of it in his writings.

But the other thing that we need to look at is that prayer for Jesus involved, at times, a dramatic encounter of God's presence – that when He went to pray, somehow it was anticipating God

showing up, God speaking to Him, God revealing things to Him so that He would be able to go forward. Prayer was not merely speaking words to God, but was a truly spiritual experience of God.

Even in the book of Acts which is written by Luke, he accents the gathering of the church in prayer, the centurion Cornelius' prayer, Paul and Silas are freed from prison while the church was praying. All of this brings into sharp focus, the fact that Luke considered it very important, that prayer was so integral to all that Jesus did and the fact that, as He began to walk into the role that He was given by the Father, prayer helped Him to connect His humanity with His divinity, to know exactly what God was wanting Him to do at particular moments. He was fully human as He walked here on earth while being fully divine. So, His proximity with God in these prayer times helped Him to understand His role and to walk in it.

Let us delve into this passage!

Eight days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a mountain to pray. And as He was praying, the appearance of His face was transformed, and His clothes became dazzlingly white. So, eight days after this incident where He asked His disciples, "Well, who do you say that I am?" And it's already begun to progress towards Jerusalem because He's talking about His death. In 9:21, He warns His disciples saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things. He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day He will be raised from the dead."

So, He's beginning to share with the disciples what's going to happen. And yet, as we read other passages, we see that they didn't receive it. They not only couldn't see it, but when they heard it, they rejected it. Remember, when Peter heard it, he took Jesus aside and said, "No, this will not happen to You," and Jesus rebuked him in the strongest possible terms. So, even though He was sharing with the disciples, they weren't actually understanding the full import of all that He was trying to communicate to them.

Here is Jesus, up on the mountain, and He has taken His three closest – Peter, James and John – and He is praying. All of a sudden, His face is radiant and His clothes become dazzlingly white. Then it says that Moses and Elijah appeared and they began talking with Jesus. What a glorious sight! What were they talking about? They were speaking about His exodus from this world which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem. In other words, they were talking about what was going to happen to Jesus – that He was going to leave the world, and that it was going to happen in Jerusalem.

Jesus often referred back, talking about the law and the prophets. In fact, when He was talking to His disciples, He said, "Why haven't you understood this? Everything that has happened to Me was found in the law and the prophets." And here we see the law epitomized by Moses and the prophets by Elijah; and both of them come together and they are talking about His exodus from the world. Something that Jesus had said was written there, spoken about. They were now talking to Him about it, affirming for Jesus that this is what needed to happen.

And it made me stop and think about Jesus. What was His state of mind at this point? Was He lonely? Was He just feeling like He was the only person who was carrying this knowledge of what He had come to do? Even though He had shared it with His disciples, they couldn't understand. That must have been a lonely road to walk; you're trying to tell the people closest to you that this is what is going to happen to you – and they cannot see it. Yet, He gets this mountain top experience where God brings these two from antiquity into His presence, and through them, tells Him about what is going to happen. They were talking about Jesus' exodus from the world, affirming that He was on the right track. Later we see that Jesus turned and irrevocably moved towards Jerusalem, knowing that this was where He had to go. Moses and Elijah confirmed that for Jesus in this moment.

I wonder whether Jesus needed that confirmation – that as He went about His day, as He met with His disciples – whether He was unsure or saddened? He went through all the emotions that we go through – to see that the closest people don't recognize what was going to happen to Him, don't even want it to happen because they don't see or understand the whole picture. Yet, in this moment, God decided that He was going to encourage His Son, and so He brings to that mountain Moses and Elijah, and they talk to Jesus about what was going to happen.

Then the bible tells us that when the disciples woke up, they saw the glory of Jesus and the two men standing with Him. As Moses and Elijah started to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out: "Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters and memorials – one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Peter wasn't seeing anything spiritual in this; he was still anchored in his mortality. He was thinking, "This is a wonderful thing! How do we remember it? Let us make three memorials so that we can always come back here and remember the place where we saw Jesus." And even as He was thinking in these terms, it was almost as if God shushed him, quietened him. Because a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them.

The bible tells us that a voice comes to them saying, "This is My Son, My chosen One. listen to Him." If terror had gripped them before the voice came, I wonder what would have happened after they heard the voice. What a moment! Then it ends by saying, "They didn't tell anyone at that time what they had seen."

What a stimulating and invigorating passage! It makes you realize how much the Father loves, and loved Jesus at that moment, to bring affirmation to Him. But also to realize what the Father did in trying to let the disciples know that they had to listen to His Son. This was His Chosen One, and they had to listen to Him, almost giving an impetus to the things that Jesus had been talking about.

I think that's a good word for us – to listen to Jesus. We've talked about prayer and the season of Lent affords us the opportunity to spend much time in prayer and fasting, trying to draw closer to God, to hear Him speak, to understand the precepts that are in the Word, to get fresh revelation from Him, even direction. During this time, we need to have a holy dissatisfaction with our spiritual lives and say: This is what I want to do. I want to draw closer to God so that I can hear Him. More than that, I will listen to Him.

It says that the disciples were asleep when then momentous occasion occurred. Sometimes when we go through crisis moments, and we ought to go to the Lord in prayer. Instead we balk at it and miss a wonderful moment in our lives. I wonder whether it was because the disciples were sleepy, maybe tired. Maybe we are tired too, distracted and haven't realized the moment as they too hadn't. maybe we're thinking more fleshly as Peter did – let's immortalize this moment.

Prayer time is such a good time. Jesus showed us that He always expected an encounter with God, not just one-way – "Lord, this is what I want," but to be able to have an encounter with God. Maybe this period ahead is where God is leading us to have multiple encounters with Him that changes completely from ones where we go to Him asking for things to ones where we understand what His heart is for us and the world, and having Him authenticate that we too are His chosen ones. Maybe even inviting people around us to listen because we are His messengers of reconciliation. I wonder whether that's what He's laying on you today.

One other thing that I believe that we need to wrap our minds around even as we look at these words that God spoke, "Listen to Him." This is connected to the question that Jesus asked: Who do

you say I am? When we answer that question, then we will be able to understand whether we will listen to Him partially or totally.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

Is He your friend, your brother, the One who's given you a ticket to heaven? Savior? Lord? Who is Jesus to you and me? That is the most important question. We ought to be able to say: He is Christ the Messiah, the One who has come to give salvation to me. He is my Savior and now He is my Lord, and I walk every day wanting to be in perfect accordance with His will.

How do I do that? I do that by listening to Him. Beloved, as you know, there's a big difference between hearing from Him and listening to Him. We can walk in proximity to Him and hear Him speak to us and yet not listen. But if He is our Lord as well, then we ought to listen to every word that He speaks, every word that He has spoken as well from pages of the Word. Scholars tell us that there are about 20,000 words of Jesus in the New Testament – words that He has spoken. Be creative to just go through those words. See how you can refresh them in your own spirit, in your own walk with Him.

Who do you say that I am, and will you listen to Him?

One last thing I want to say to you: Maybe you're in that place too that Jesus possibly was. You're in a lonely place. You're doing something that you don't have support for but you know it's the right thing to do. People around you are trying to dissuade you. Maybe there's opposition as well. It's not an easy road. I want to invite you to turn to God and say, "Lord, I need affirmation from You. I need confirmation that I'm on the right path. I need You to touch my spirit in such a way that I come away just sure about what I'm doing. I need You to authenticate this mission, this plan, that You have placed on my life.

"Who do you say I am?" is still the underlying question whether it is in this area or in the other. Answer that question beloved, and then let's go to the Lord in prayer and expect a spiritual experience with Him. And I pray that you will have many such mountain top experiences as we go through this period of Lent that will just transform each one of us for the journey that is in front.

May God bless us.