

Sunday May 16, 2021  
Lesson 11: Jesus Transformed  
Scripture: Luke 9: 28-36

**Context:**

As our series continues to dive into all the ways God is revealed in holiness, we look at the different ways God interacts with humanity. Today's lesson comes from the New Testament in the gospel of Luke, focusing on the Transfiguration. To accompany the past two weeks examining how God interacted with Moses and Elijah, today we see both of them standing with Jesus in a moment of glory.

The story is known as the Transfiguration, as Jesus is "transformed" in the presence of his disciples Peter, John, and James. The three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all place this story immediately after the first prediction of the passion, a strategic position to parallel Jesus' baptism.<sup>1</sup> After receiving heaven's confirmation as the Son of God at baptism, the transfiguration reaffirms Christ as the Son of God as the narrative turns toward Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> This event demonstrates how Christ will turn towards the role he is called to fulfill.

As with each gospel, Luke gives different details to fill in the story. There are trademarks of how Jesus goes about events as he begins the event of "going up on a mountain to pray." Luke also fulfills the role of giving the details of the conversation, left out in the other gospel accounts. The conversation is on Jerusalem and how Jesus will fulfill his role there. Peter and the other disciples watch all this take place and stay awake to see the full grandeur of the scene.

Even as Peter makes an attempt to commemorate the event, he is interrupted. A cloud comes and a voice reminds them to listen to Jesus as he is God's Son. The disciples are speechless telling no one of the event until later on. The event reveals two important things about the identity of Jesus Christ and how God is revealed to humanity.

Firstly, Jesus' role as preeminent as the Son of God is established. He is to be heard, not over against Moses and the prophets, but as the proper interpreter and fulfillment of what had been preserved in the scriptures.<sup>3</sup> So even as Jesus stands and talks with Moses and Elijah, the voice in the cloud reminds Peter and the disciples how God's self is being fully revealed to humanity in Jesus Christ. The God of Moses and Elijah affirms them in their unity with Jesus but asserts the finality of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is the way.

Secondly, the experience reveals not just glory, but the pain and suffering God knows. While the scene is definitely dazzling, the conversation is heavy. On this

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<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Craddock, "Luke," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 133.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 135.

mountain, Jesus discusses what he will do in Jerusalem. And while there will be a resurrection, there will also be betrayal, suffering, and death. God is showing us a more intimate and vulnerable side of God not seen before in previous encounters.

### **Application**

The Transfiguration is usually observed the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. This is done to bring us full circle from Jesus' birth, to his baptism, and then to the moment where he begins his march to Jerusalem where his ministry will culminate in his suffering, death, and resurrection. On this Sunday, while we might talk of Jesus being transfigured before his disciples, we also observe how we will enter a time in the wilderness. We will acknowledge the journey to Jerusalem as one of power, betrayal, love, and mystery. We recognize the greatest gift humanity has ever received; the presence of the Lord here on earth.

Most sermons and bible studies focus on the event of the Transfiguration as some mountaintop experience. We are invited to see the glory of God and to dwell on our own spiritual highs. Yet I think there is another component to the Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration reveals to us how intimately God wants to be in relationship with us. We are reminded as Jesus stands with Moses and Elijah of the role he came to play, of how God loved us so much we were sent Jesus. Jesus was the embodiment of love, God being revealed in the fullest. It was not God coming by amidst smoke and mirrors on a mountain in the desert, or a thin, quiet sound near a cave. God came in the flesh to converse, lead, and nurture humanity.

Yet God also showed the tender side of God's self. God showed how the Lord is not immune to suffering or pain. Just as Moses and Elijah cried out for God to prove that God was indeed with humanity, Jesus showed us as much as he even experienced the betrayal and painful crucifixion. God did this because God loves us deeply.

Every Lent and even beyond Lent, I reflect upon this fact of the goodness we find in Jesus Christ. In the world in which we live, we often see those who value success, prestige, and power. How many times have we watched a celebrity or politician who flout their wealth or name, and then we affirm them for how "they showed the world how it was done?" Or how many times have we watched as people focused upon themselves, attempting to deceive themselves and others as they show off their skills, opinions, or wealth.

Yet Jesus did not come to revel in any of those things. Yes, he performed miracles, healed people, and preached with passion and eloquence. When the time came though where Jesus could have bailed or shown his true "power" he chose not to do so. Instead, Jesus allowed himself to experience pain, rejection, and suffering. His final words were not of curses, but of blessings and forgiveness to those who had hurt them. He even cried out in pain, acknowledging the power of lament and mourning.

While we are certainly resurrection people and should shout for joy for the gift of eternal life offered in our Lord, I think there is just as much power as to looking at how Jesus lived in his final moments and those moments leading up to his last hours. God showed us the power of vulnerability, compassion, and selflessness. And God reminded us that our God doesn't hide behind power, control, prestige, or wealth. Our God knows about pain, suffering, and the power of love. We are given hope for how God has called us to live and model our own lives. We are called to see how Jesus Christ offers us life

for here and today.

Why do you think the Transfiguration is so important to teaching us about who God is and what God does? Where is God calling you to be vulnerable, open, and loving? What is the importance of having Moses and Elijah stand next to Jesus in this story? How can you adopt the spirit of Christ in your daily life?

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