

When I was young I was a part of the Royal School of Church Music, which is essentially scouts for nerdy Anglican choir kids. It is designed to teach you about music, about the bible, and about church history. There were tests at each level and as you progressed you got different colored ribbons and medals to wear with your choir robes. To a nerdy choir kid, it was a big deal. One day, when I was around 13, I was chomping at the bit to get a new ribbon, but we were running out of time before the church service. Thus, our leader asked me to answer the question as we vested and headed upstairs. My task for the day was to summarize the gospels. I began to quickly run through Jesus' birth, his naming in the temple, his baptism, his healing and teaching stories. And when I got to the transfiguration, I simply summed it up as "he went up the mountain, and then he glowed". I was startled when everyone around me fell into laughter at this summary of "and then he glowed". Still to this day, I get at least one text message on the last Sunday of Epiphany with just those words from one of my old choir friends.

What was it that made "and then he glowed" just so funny? I think it was the fact that my 13 year old self took something so miraculous and powerful and made it sound ordinary. The transfiguration is miraculous but about much more than Jesus "glowing".

First, this whole event is set apart from the rest of Jesus's healing and teaching. Jesus takes himself and only three of his disciples away to physically head up a mountain, in the same way that Moses went up a mountain to receive God's law. It is a place set apart. Once Jesus and his disciple are on top of the mountain, a cloud descends upon them. They experience a lack of clarity – they can no longer see the world around them or connect to the time and space that they are in. And this collapse – or perhaps expanse- of time is reinforced by the fact that Jesus begins to shine like the sun and that Moses and Elijah appear next to him.

Let's pause for a minute here and step into the shoes of the disciples who are there with Jesus. Close your eyes and imagine yourself on a hike with a Jesus. And think of him not as your savior, but as a friend. But not just any friend, a really cool friend who you really respect. And imagine that this happens to you. A cloud descends, your friend starts to radiate light, and then these extra people appear. What is it that you're feeling? (give space for answers)

I used to be frustrated by Peter's silly suggestion here to build three houses, but when I try to put myself into his place, I'm truly just amazed that he was able to say anything at all. I too would have fallen to the ground, and I think that I would be too shaken to even say anything. And then, in addition to feeling (list feelings that people suggested), you hear a voice from God, naming your friend as God's Son and instructing you to listen. All of this would be entirely overwhelming. But

Jesus, doesn't leave his disciples in this place. He comes to them and touches them. And tells them to not be afraid. His touch and his words bring them back to the security of their own time and place, back to normal life and the friend that they knew, and then they head back down the mountain and are asked not to share what happened.

And so what do we do with this today? This miraculous, remarkable, seemingly unbelievable experience? First, it is important to note that the gospel writers and the church already have done something with it. The writer of the book of Mark (which was likely the first gospel written) places this event at the half-way point of his story. He makes a very clear demarcation. Prior to this event are Jesus' healings and parables, but from this event on Jesus begins his path to the cross. Today we read from Matthew, and he does much the same thing, though he add some stories about what it means to be a disciple between Jesus' transfiguration and death.

The church has taken this story and also used it as a turning point. The transfiguration always falls on the last Sunday of Epiphany. Epiphany: the season where we have pondered how God is manifest in our own lives. From this point on, we will move into Lent: a time of preparation and awareness. We too will head down the mountain with Jesus and then begin to prepare ourselves to walk

alongside him to his death. This event that pushes our minds to the edges of understanding helps us to know that something different is coming.

But secondly, I think that this story is important to consider in our lives today and in our own interaction with Jesus, because people do still have “mountaintop experiences”. There are stories of people like Juan Diego who saw Our Lady of Guadalupe in Tepeyac, or St. Teresa of Avila who would have visions of Jesus before her, or Alexandrina of Balazar, who lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who had frequent visions of Jesus and Mary. And so, if you have a mountaintop experience, a vision of Jesus in a way that seems unbelievable and remarkable, then trust yourself that God does do miraculous and marvelous things.

And for those of us who haven’t had that kind of mountaintop experience, remember that Jesus only took three of his disciples up that mountain. We can never know why he chose Peter, James, and John specifically to experience this event. But we can know that many other disciples were down at the bottom of the mountain and that they still followed Jesus, walked with him to Jerusalem, and experienced the resurrection. There is still much work for us to do in this world, in the day-to-day moments.

Part of why Christianity is so remarkable, and was originally quite scandalous, is because of our belief that God would come to us in the form of Jesus

to live a human life. Jesus' incarnation means that God participated in the day to day needs of all humans. Eating, sleeping, and hugging. Learning how to walk, listening to (or not listening to) his parents, making friends, experiencing joy and pain and sorrow. Jesus brought divinity into our understanding of humanity. My 13-year-old self that made the transfiguration seem mundane may have been on to something. Because even if no one "glows", we can still have faith and trust that Jesus is walking along side us, transforming our worldly deaths into new life.

As we head into Lent, hold this story of the transfiguration with you. This example of God's miraculous power and reminder of Jesus' divinity as God's Son. But hold it alongside the ordinary. Because God comes to us in both the miraculous and mundane, waiting to transform our hearts and our lives.