

“Lord, it is good for us to be here...” (Matthew 17.4)

Have you ever been somewhere before, perhaps unexpectedly, and thought, “wow, am I ever glad I am here to see this”? Perhaps it is being able to see a beautiful sunset, or you ran into an old friend after decades apart, or it could be so many other reasons. For me, one moment like this that sticks out was a trip home that I had in the middle of the COVID pandemic a few years ago. In Toronto, all churches had been ordered closed for months, and remained so during the summer of 2020. When the churches did eventually re-open, the diocese had imposed a ban on singing and music, so if you did manage to get in to church, it was a pretty boring. But, I remember being able to escape Toronto and come home to New Brunswick during a more relaxed period of restrictions and being able to go to church with music. I cried. I cried at the opening hymn, I cried during the sung parts of the Preface and Sanctus, I was just utterly overwhelmed by the beauty of being able to worship God with heart *and* voice. I really felt like it was good for me to be there – it felt as though I was given a moment of grace – and it recharged me to go back to Toronto and face another year of Pandemic seminary.

Having had that experience, I can’t help but think if that’s even a small bit of how Peter, James, and John felt on the top of that mountain with Jesus. Jesus took them up a mountain, presumably not for any special reason, they thought, and when they got there, he had a sudden and great change of appearance: “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (Matt. 17.2). And there appeared with him both Moses and Elijah, talking to him. Peter clearly realized that something important was happening, and acknowledged that to Jesus by saying it was good to be there and that he wanted to make three tents for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. “He was still speaking, when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased: listen to him” (17.5). The overwhelming glory of God caused them to hide in Holy fear, only to be comforted by Jesus, and then it was all over – seemingly as quickly as it began.

Wow. Such a short episode is so packed with imagery, so let’s unpack that for a moment. Jesus’ face shone like the sun and had clothes as white as light. We are told by St. John in the prologue to his Gospel that Jesus – the Word – always has existed, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1.14). This is the glory John is talking about – on this mountain! Where Jesus shone bright like the light of the world, and had clothes as white as light. This hearkens back to visions of God in the Old Testament where the brightness and glory of God was overwhelming, and how in a vision of the Prophet Daniel, the *Ancient of Days* wore clothes as white as snow (Dan. 7.9). And this image of Jesus also looks ahead to Revelation, where “...his face was like the sun shining in full strength” (Rev. 1.16). This is the glory and brightness that Jesus always had and continues to have as the divine Son of God, and member of the Holy Trinity – but for a moment was shone through on Earth.

Then we have the appearance of Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus. Moses, the great leader of Israel from captivity in Egypt, and giver of the Law. And Elijah, the great prophet, who in Jewish tradition is a forerunner to the Messiah. The last words of the Old Testament are from the prophet Malachi, who speaks from the Lord: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (Mal. 4.5-6). By the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus, they figure as the most important parts of Judaism, Moses the Law, and Elijah the Prophets. Jesus, then, is seen at the Transfiguration as the coming together of all of God’s people – the culmination and fulfillment of

the Law and the Prophets. Peter recognizes the holiness of the moment and wants to build shelters for these holy men, but not before he is cut off by something even more spectacular.

A bright cloud comes in and overshadows them and the voice of God spoke out to identify Jesus as His Son. The presence of God here is seen as the presence of God in our Old Testament lesson, when Moses was up on the mount in the presence of God and was surrounded by the cloud. St. Peter, in the portion of his Epistle we read today, says that this voice heard by him and the other disciples was the unambiguous announcement of who Jesus was, and the basis of their claims – not some made up story.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is a pivotal moment in the story of Jesus' earthly ministry. It is a moment where human nature meets God in glory – where the created meets its creator – and where Jesus acts as the bridge and connecting point between heaven and earth. "It is good, Lord, to be here", indeed. What a privilege!

While you and I were not there on the mountain with Jesus, Peter, James, and John, the transfiguration of Jesus bears much importance for us. Peter sees the humanity of Jesus immersed in the Glory of God, "and in that instant [he] glimpses the mystery of our faith: that God became human so that humanity might become like God."¹ Peter and the other disciples were witnesses to a holy moment so that we could know the truth about Jesus, and they were granted the privilege of being in the presence of the Almighty. Being in the presence of God made much clear for Peter, and so, too, does it do for us.

When we dwell in the presence of God – when we want to be immersed in his presence – we are changed beings. When we choose to be influenced by God's presence, we ourselves become different people – bound to God in the love of his Son and filled by the gifts of grace, the gifts of the Spirit. So, I ask you, can you think of a time that you felt immersed in the presence of God? Have you felt that somewhere you went was made holy? Or is there a place you regularly go to meet God? I know for me, it is not a feeling that I can manufacture. I cannot go looking for a place on my own "because I know God will be there". No. God is not at our control, we cannot manipulate his presence, but when we open ourselves up to his influence, when we pray for his presence, for his closeness, that is when we might have his glory revealed to us. Maybe that will be somewhere familiar to you, or perhaps in the strangest of moments, but when we allow ourselves to be molded and shaped by God, he will turn us into more god-like people, and we can shine the light of Christ into the world.

St. Peter says in his Epistle, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." We pray that it might be God's will to grant us a vision of his divine majesty, that we may be purified and strengthened by his grace, and that we may be transformed into *his* likeness from glory to glory.

May God's will be done, and may we be empty vessels ready to receive the outpouring of his grace so that we may share it with the world.

"He is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness." (Wisdom 7.26)

Alleluia!

Amen.

¹ Jason Micheli, *The Christian Century*, 2017