

“Transfigured”
Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Cor 3:12-4:2;
Luke 9:28-43a

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What if someone came up to you and said, “I have an invitation for you. We can either go pray or we can go watch the Super Bowl.” My guess is that for most of us, although we might have a bit of a guilty conscience, the sense of excitement is probably going to be a little higher on the idea of watching the game, especially this particular game, than going to pray. We don’t often think of going to pray as something that’s exciting; I have to admit it.

I wonder whether these disciples on that day, when Jesus said they were going up to the mountain to pray, were excited about going. It doesn’t say here if this was the first time they had gone up on a mountain to pray with Jesus. We do know that Jesus has going up on mountains or into the wilderness to pray before. I would assume that sometimes he took his disciples with him. It says they were struggling to stay awake, so maybe they were tired and not really thinking it was much of an event. It was just praying with Jesus. It might be a bigger event for us if we thought we were getting to pray with Jesus, but they were just going up the mountain to pray with Jesus. Almost like a friend had invited them to come pray.

It was at the moment when they were about to fall asleep that they noticed something incredible happening. We have this vision of Jesus. I believe it is more than a precursor for some movie that came along that talked about some time long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away. Some of us have a vision of this same kind of thing. I don’t know whether they got the idea for the movie from this particular passage in scripture, but we have this vision of what was going on.

As we think about the disciples there seeing the glory present, the question arises in my mind, “What do you do with that?” We may still say this in some ways. What do we do with that vision? Peter had an answer: let’s build these booths, these places for you guys to be. We’ve got this manifestation of God, so let’s put it in a place and hold on to it that way, or contain it, or honor it. It is a way of honoring.

It’s interesting to me that there’s really not an answer to Peter directly. The cloud rolls in on top of them and they hear God say, “This is the chosen, my beloved; listen to him.” There’s a contrast there to me. For a moment there, what was Peter listening to? He’s listening to his whole need, his whole tradition, his way of doing things—God should be put in a temple, in a booth, in a place.

Coming out of the reformed tradition, we have really let go of thinking God is in a place and there’s a reason for that. Yes, God showed up in a special way in this vision, this experience that they had on the mountain top, but what God suggests is to simply listen to Jesus. And Jesus doesn’t stay there and decide to make a temple and go into it and shine. It all goes away, and he goes down the mountain. It sounds like they go

down the mountain and find a place to sleep until the next day when Jesus then goes into the crowd.

Did his transfiguration, his showing God's presence, lead him away from the people? No, it led him right back down to them. It was God coming to God's people, and I think it's instructive to think about because oftentimes I think it's much easier for me to simply want the mountain top and to stay there. When we follow Jesus, we may get those mountain top experiences, but the next day Jesus is back with the people and what is he doing? He's healing.

Now I wish I could say that I had the faith, the connection to God, that I could heal like Jesus heals. I have not had that experience. But I don't think that means that I'm not supposed to be following Jesus. What it says in 1 Corinthians is that as we contemplate his glory, we get pulled into it as well. What is his glory doing? It's coming back down the mountain to be with the people, to bring healing.

If I'm following Jesus, it feels to me what this biblical story is telling me is that God—the one that can shine brightly, showing us the wonder of God's incredible nature—wants to come and be amongst us, and for us to follow and to be part of what God would have us do, to be more like Jesus. And what is Jesus doing? He's healing.

If I can't lay my hand on somebody and heal them, does that mean I can't be a part of Jesus' healing? No. Do we know anything about healing? I think we know a lot. Here he has a boy that's coming to be healed. What do we know about healing young people? I think we know a lot. We know they need to be loved. We know they need good boundaries. We know that they need safe places. We know that they need good food. We know that they need shelter. I think I know a little bit about what young people need to be healed. It feels like maybe I should be part of that somehow.

He doesn't stop with young people. He keeps healing. A good part of what he's doing is saying by letting go of some of the brokenness we have, we can follow him and bring healing. We know what adults need for healing. Of course, it's a little harder to get a handle on exactly how to define health, but let me use resilience as one indicator of health. What we know people need for resilience are things like social support, physical exercise, good coping strategies, the abilities to think well and to be flexible, humor or some way of seeing things positively, ways to accept and reassess or reframe what has happened, a moral compass, spirituality. We need to have those things and perhaps experience a little bit of struggle so that we get better at dealing with things. We know some of the things that enable healing.

There's this point in 2 Corinthians where it says we contemplate the glory of God, and this may initiate a contemplative tradition. Some practice contemplation because in contemplation to have a mountain top experience, to experience the wonder of who God is. But the point of it isn't just to get that experience. The point is that it takes us to a place where we recognize that Jesus is the one we need to pay attention to, and listen

to, and follow down the mountain, and see that he is a healer. And as we become more like him, he invites us to be healers as well. And we know a little bit about healing.

It's interesting to me that when we see somebody who we think is great, who can do these kinds of things, who is fantastic at something, one way of describing them is a bright light. I don't think I'm one of those bright lights, not that way, but I do have a little light. I think all of you have some light. Others might have more, but it doesn't matter because the point is that when we come together we bring that light. I may not be able to do it all on my own. I know there are a few things I can do. I can try to be encouraging; I can try to bring humor, I can try to help think through things, I can remind us of the grace of Christ and how important that is and how it gives us a moral compass, and all of that. Then we can also do it together because it is as we do it together, as we follow Christ, as we work our way to be more like Christ, not just as individuals but as a church, as a body, we become described as the Body of Christ, reflecting the light of Christ into the world.

I have to admit that sometimes it feels like the church has become irrelevant to a lot of folks. I wonder if part of it is not that I have spent too much time thinking about being a church and not enough time thinking about being a follower of Christ, of bringing the healing the world needs. You notice what it says when Jesus was done that day: everyone was astounded at the greatness of God. If we're becoming more like Christ, perhaps the world will become astounded at the greatness of God.

So we are invited to be those who follow Christ, who recognize it's an incremental work at being healers, of joining around the table that we might know that we are part of the family of faith that is able to bring healing, and to hope that we can become those to whom the world looks and says, "Look at the greatness of God!" Amen.