

August 9 , 2015

May these words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

"Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said"

We all know what it feels like to be in situations that we have not experienced before. I always thought these times would get less as the years go by and our inventory of experiences grows...but for me anyway, that is not the case.

A number of you have met my friend Nigel from Wales, an "unchurched" fellow, a gentleman who I can only get to church under one ruse or another

A couple of years ago I inveigled Nigel into a situation when he met face to face with a fully robed Bishop Jeff Lee.. I asked the Bishop if before the procession he would walk down the aisle, tap Nigel on the shoulder and welcome him by name.

Now Nigel is not a man at a loss for words, but when the Bishop introduced himself.....

For the first time in the fifty five years that he has been my friend, **Nigel blushed bright red and was lost for words.**

Eventually Nigel stuttered, "Goo good morning, your eminence" and bowed his head. I still remind him of the event.....usually in the company of mutual friends.

Today, we are celebrating the Transfiguration of our Lord. "Transfiguration" is not a word one uses much in everyday conversation, well at least I don't. In fact, it's one of those words that doesn't get much use at all outside of church — sort of like the word, "prodigal" from the "story of the prodigal son." "Prodigal" means, "one who spends resources freely or over-extravagantly." But we never use "prodigal" outside of the Bible. Even when Karen and I have a conversation about money, we never talk about "prodigal" spending...no, not even when she comes home with another pair of shoes.

Transfiguration is another strange churchy word that we would hardly use in everyday conversation. I even had to Google the word.

'Transfiguration' is sort of like 'transformation' but 'transfiguration' focuses on appearance. So when Jesus appeared in dazzling white in our story today, we say he was "transfigured" — dramatically changed in appearance.

'Transfiguration' can also signal a change that glorifies or exalts somebody — which fits the stories as well.

All the readings today have to do with transfiguration in one form or another. In the Exodus reading, Moses comes down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand. All was pretty well stage managed, with the exception that Aaron and all the Israelites were shell-shocked because Moses' face was shining from his speaking with God.

Since extortionately priced sunglasses had yet to be invented back then, Aaron asked Moses to put a veil over his face so they could still communicate with each other. That worked fine. So when Moses went up Mount Sinai to talk with God, he took the veil off. And when he came back down again to talk with Aaron and the Israelites, Moses put the veil on again, at least until the whole shiny/glowy thing wore off.

Have we ever walked outside on a winter morning and been overwhelmed by the sun's rays reflecting off the new snow? It can seem like the whole of creation is reflecting the glory and beauty of God. Maybe that's what happened to Moses after he spoke with God.

The glory of God is so strong that it was reflected in Moses' very being, like the snow glistening in the sun. But, after a time, Moses didn't need the veil any more. The transfiguration wore off.

That's how life works, I guess. If we don't watch it, we can lose our shine. There's no doubt we, like Moses, need times to recharge our souls, times of encounter with God and God's people, so that we reflect God's light for us.

After too long without prayer or worship, too long away from a community of faith, our countenance can begin to dull a bit. I have always felt that way. I need to attend church on a weekly basis, to maintain the glow; the energy from the presence of our Lord.

No pressure of course...this is an Episcopal church...we don't expect our congregation to attend church every Sunday.....**WRONG.**

Adam Thomas, an 18th century Church of England clergyman and religious writer, puts it this way:

“Over time our shine tends to fade. Every inhospitable word spoken, every neighbor mistreated and every resource hoarded layers grime over our radiance. Every hand unextended, every gift squandered and every road not taken leaves layers of apathetic dust.

The world tells us that the radiant things out there are the things we purchase: ‘When you wear the shiny stone or drive the shiny car, you will shine.’ Too often we cede our light to the glossy waste of the world and forget that we are the ones God made to shine.”

It’s almost as if we veil ourselves and cover up God’s radiance. Today’s gospel story is another take on that strange word “transfiguration.” Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain to pray. And when they got to it, this time it was Jesus’ clothes that shined in a dazzling white. Then, as if the connection to the transfiguration of Moses wasn’t clear enough, we read that Moses and Elijah appeared and started talking to Jesus.

On that mountain top, thought to be Mount Hermon... which straddles the modern day border between Lebanon and Syria, Peter James and John must have experienced a wide range of emotions.

The writer tells us that Peter and his companions were tired to start with, but Peter, struck by the amazing happenings around him asked Jesus if he could make some tents, tabernacles, booths, dwellings, or memorials depending on which Bible Translation you read.

A number of commentaries say that this idea from Peter was so that Moses, Elijah and Jesus, might hang around for a bit.

Not sure about those commentaries. I just think that Peter, like my friend Nigel, said the first thing that came into his head.

In any event practically as soon as Peter spoke these words, Moses and Elijah were eclipsed by a cloud and disappeared. And a voice boomed through the cloud, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

The disciples are often cast as not the sharpest knives in the drawer, but even Peter, James, and John could figure this transfiguration out. God was identifying Jesus with the glory of Moses and Elijah, but also upping the ante. ....

**Jesus was God’s Chosen one...His beloved son.**

So the disciples should listen while they could, for God's shining moments sometimes pass away quickly. Just as Moses and Elijah departed, so too would Jesus. They didn't know it yet, but his departure would be on a cross, and it would mark a beginning as much as an end.

It's easy to be hard on Peter here, but let's not blame him. Peter was trying to be helpful, trying to preserve the perfect moment when Jesus was shining in radiance on the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah. Peter had forgotten his digital camera at home, so he tried to mark the moment by building dwellings for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus to stay in.

But, as R. Alan Culpepper, a prominent Baptist theologian, observes, Peter's attempt to enshrine his mountaintop experience wasn't what Jesus had in mind: "Faithfulness is not achieved by freezing a moment but by following on in confidence that God is leading and that what lies ahead is even greater than what we have already experienced".

Peter tries to stop time, to mark the moment, but he couldn't pull it off. Neither can we. The phrase, "time flies" is one of culture's most ancient. Any parent will tell you that no matter how hard you try, you can't stop a child from growing up.

Life marches on...we need to be in step and to never forget that Jesus Christ the man Transfigured by God in today's Gospel is our Lord and Savior.....  
Amen

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