

Transfiguration

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead

This Sunday, we remember Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain with Peter, James, and John. Miriam Webster's dictionary defines the word as a change in appearance, like a metamorphosis. The way the ugly duckling turns into a beautiful swan. It's a revelation of the true inner nature.

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up to a mountain. I'm inclined to think of Mount Doug in Victoria, for example. Jesus' appearance is suddenly transformed into a dazzling, shining figure, and Moses and Elijah are talking with him. This image has so many possibilities and sidetracks that could keep me in sermons for a month, but tempting as they are, I will avoid them and stay focused on the main point.

Mark's gospel says that Peter blurts out about making three dwellings because they were terrified and he didn't know what else to say. Immediately, Moses and Elijah are gone and they hear the voice of God from a cloud saying, this is my beloved Son, listen to Him.

I imagine every day with Jesus would be an epiphany of one sort or another, but this was something special.

Who Jesus is, was something they wrestled with and, I'd say, didn't truly understand until after his resurrection.

The three of them are given a glimpse of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah together at the same moment. Moses was Israel's greatest leader and teacher. Elijah was the greatest prophet. How did Jesus rank with them?

Did this mean that Jesus was up there with Moses? That would be an audacious idea of a first-century Jew. The same with Elijah. Jesus ranking with them? Incredible.

But what they are told is that Jesus is the beloved, the Son, and despite how great Moses and Elijah are, Jesus is superior. But superior in a way they could only have an inkling. It's not that Jesus outranks them in the hierarchy of heroes of Judaism.

Jesus is superior not in degree or rank. He is superior in kind. Moses and Elijah are purely human, but Jesus is not. Human but also divine.

Moses and Elijah are subject to the forces of life and death. Jesus commands them.

In the prologue to his gospel about Jesus, John writes that Jesus is the instrument of creation itself. Moses, Elijah and they are all mortal creations. Jesus is the creator in the flesh.

Remember when Jesus feeds the five thousand. In Mark's version, following that event some of Jesus disciples including Peter are in a boat when a storm blows up and Jesus calms the storm just by commanding it. Mark writes that they were terrified by the storm and also of Jesus. They wondered, who is this who commands even the storm? Who has command over the forces of nature itself? The creator does.

I can imagine why they were totally freaked-out. This man they walked the dusty roads alongside, is the creator?

And so what do we make of all this?

Our world is in sad shape if you hadn't noticed. I could produce a long list, but you know them. It feels at times that our world is out of control.

We hide from a global virus that could kill us.

You know the rest of the list. Global warming, crazy people running nations, economic melt-down and I could go on.

The pandemic won't last forever.

There is hope for political leadership.

Perhaps we will find solutions to the climate crisis.

Though we are subject to the forces of death and aging, Jesus is not and we are in His hands.

Have courage. Share your courage, even a little bit of it, with someone else.

Believe it or not, your reassurance that life is not out of control could just make all the difference to someone nearby.