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## Transfiguring God

Today's reading from Mark begins "Six days later Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain." Six days later than what? What happened six days before that Mark wants linked to the Transfiguration? Usually Mark is in a narrative rush, connecting his stories with words like "immediately" and "at once." But this time it is six days later. There is some connection he wants us to get, some connection we must understand or we will fail to grasp what we are about to experience. Six days before Jesus predicted his passion directly and plainly for the first time.

Six days before, as Mark puts it, "he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all of this quite openly."

Peter, shocked and scandalized by the very idea of Jesus suffering and dying, immediately rebukes Jesus. He is not going to follow someone who he considers weak, nonviolent and who gives in rather than triumphs over! Jesus, in front of the other disciples says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Satan is not a person with horns and a red tail. Satan is the scapegoating device, the pointing of the finger, the "I'm right and you're wrong" rather than "it doesn't matter who is right and who is wrong, you are both loved and if I must die to show you the truth of that, I will."

Peter says, "No, you can't be like that. That kind of behavior is crazy. The world works on deciding who is to blame and then punishing them.

"Get behind me Satan." That whole blaming thing that the world thinks so sane is the scapegoating mechanism. That is "the Satan" personified. Jesus has come to put it behind him by revealing it to us so that we won't be caught in its power.

He then tells both the disciples and the crowd that if they want to become his disciples, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him. To deny our self is to refuse to yield to the desire to blame and point the finger when everything in us wants to. Have you ever had that burning desire to blame? I have and often.

In my view South Korea is doing such a good job with this during the Olympics. They refuse to demonize their neighbor to the north no matter what they have done and have offered them participation in their celebration of human unity as co-

equals instead. They have not yielded to their desire to blame and point the finger and make themselves look good at North Korea's expense. I marvel at their maturity.

Those who want to be Jesus' disciples must also take up their cross and suffer with him. That is we must forgive rather than violently destroy. That's what Jesus did with us and what Jesus wants us to do with each other.

This new way of thinking got revealed to them six days before. Now it's the seventh day, the day of completion, the day we see it all – Transfiguration! On this day we get the whole picture, though the disciples cannot understand this until after the resurrection.

The Apostle Paul, in our Epistle lesson that we did not read, says the disciples minds are still veiled for they are still dwelling in a world they think is governed by death. (Remember the scapegoating mechanism always leads to death.) They have not yet seen “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

On the mountain, “His clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.” Something was happening here beyond human imagining. Creation light emanates from within him. It was not reflected light, coming from somewhere else, bouncing off his raiment and entering our eyes; it was light coming directly from within him. We are seeing God; the God who said; “Let light shine out of darkness.” We are seeing “the light of the knowledge of the Glory of Christ, who is the image of God”.

The Transfiguration vividly presents the unprecedented revelation of the non-violent Jesus who will die rather than kill. But it won't end with his death for God will raise him up. Our wrath does not control history; God's love does and his love will keep us in relationship no matter what our wrath does to us.

While the disciples are on the mountain top and after Jesus has been transfigured before them, Elijah and Moses appear talking with Jesus. Now I doubt they were transfigured though that's how I had always imagined it. I probably saw it portrayed that way in a children's illustrated Bible and it stuck with me. In my mind Elijah and Moses were there to show support for what Jesus is doing—like celebrity endorsements for a new product. But maybe their presence was meant to inspire contrast with Jesus rather than an endorsement. We know Moses murdered an Egyptian and Elijah, in a contest with a competing religion, had his rivals all slaughtered when he gained the upper hand. Jesus never killed anyone. He was a different kind of leader, modeling a different approach.

Peter was certainly awestruck by their presence, or more accurately, terrified. Leadership through terror! Isn't that the norm? You have a parade with high stepping soldiers carrying guns, weapons of mass destruction, and displays of power so friends and foes are all terrified. Peter in his terror recognizes no difference between the three leaders and in his guilt wants to build a sanctuary to protect himself from their wrath. But there is a huge difference.

A cloud overshadows them. They duck as it moves in. "From the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'" The cloud is the embodiment of the presence of God. It tells us who Jesus is. He is God's Son the beloved. After establishing his identity, the voice says, "Listen to him!" Listen to **him**, exclamation point. Listen to Jesus. Not Moses, not Elijah; Jesus. Moses and Elijah were men, individuals on their own journey, people moving toward the truth but not living it fully. This is why I say Jesus was transfigured but not Moses and Elijah. The final and deepest truth is Jesus, the one who went to the cross and experienced the resurrection, the one who shows us the face of God.

"Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus." The revelation was complete. They had seen who Jesus is. They had seen that the transcendent beauty of God radiates from him. He is the revelation of truth, the showing-forth of God.

By being with them on the mountain we too have learned that we are to listen to Jesus, the nonviolent one, more than to any other in the entire universe. With our overwhelming experience of who he really is, we are ready to descend the mountain and journey with him through Lent toward Calvary and the resurrection.

"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." How could they understand the glory of the cross coming at it as they were, from before it happened? It would have been totally impossible for them. Their imaginations could not have envisioned it. No wonder Jesus told them to not tell any one what they had seen.

Even we, with 2000 years of history to ponder it, are stunned by what God has done in Jesus and we are looking at it after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead! As we gradually take into ourselves what God has already done, we are transfigured in a way beyond our imagination. You see, we worship a transfiguring God! A God who slowly but surely changes us so that Christ's radiance is more and more seen through us. What could be more hopeful?! Amen.