

## **Year C-Transfiguration Sunday-2019-Everyone Was Overwhelmed by God's Greatness**

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**Luke 9:28-43**

### **Everyone Was Overwhelmed by God's Greatness**

Jesus climbed to the top of a mountain to pray and he took three disciples with him. While he prayed the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became luminous. The Jesus they knew took on a look they had never seen.

Two men become visible beside Jesus. They turn out to be Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest heroes in Jewish history. The three of them talk together, each emanating a radiance that sets them apart. Peter, James and John are witnessing a high-level conversation. Did it have anything to do with them, with the fate of the human species; with God's plan for rescuing all of us from ourselves?

Luke tells us the three dazzling ones are speaking about Jesus' departure, which he is about to accomplish at Jerusalem. How do you "accomplish" a "departure?" Strange speech, incomprehensible to them! They are like young children overhearing their parents in the next room, their words drifting towards them like distant mumbles. They catch words and phrases but can't quite catch the drift. The elders seem to be talking about things beyond their world yet the disciples suspect they are involved.

"Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep" Things of incredible importance are happening and they can barely keep their eyes open. Jesus had told them eight days before that "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Then he had said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

What do they deny themselves of? They deny themselves of payback, revenge, the expression of violence and they pick up the cross of suffering love by imitating Jesus. Now Jesus has gathered these three disciples and taken them to the top of a mountain where he wants to show them something. They are on stimulus overload and everything in them wants to go to sleep, shutting out the world and what Jesus had said. They thought Jesus was going to be a warrior leader and they would be his Lieutenants. Instead he says he is going to die and be raised. Talk about cognitive dissonance! Now what is he up to?

To their credit they manage to stay awake long enough to catch a glimpse of something beyond their comprehension. If they had not chosen to stretch themselves they would have missed it. Does spiritual alertness require discipline and intentionality? I think so. I know that when some new and important insight begins to dawn on me, I want to run away. At that early stage, everything in me wants to shut down and return to my familiar oblivion.

Just as the three glorified figures were leaving, Peter, whose mind has been blown, tells Jesus he wants to build three dwellings, one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus. The narrator tells us that Peter, whose circuits were overloaded, didn't know what to say so blabbed out this thing about building three dwellings. Just then a cloud covers them, filling them with terror as it overshadows them. Was it lethal gas? Did God want to kill them? From the cloud a voice comes saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Jesus completes and takes precedence over Moses and Elijah. Instead of Moses' Ten Commandments, there is but one. "Listen to Jesus!"

Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. The law tries to change our rivalrous behavior from the outside but cannot change our hearts. The prophets warn us away from using the law to sacrifice the weak to benefit the strong. Jesus goes beyond them both by showing us a way he can change our hearts so that we refrain from sacrificing any at all. Last week our denomination chose to sacrifice people who are of a certain sexual orientation and therein lies the problem.

"When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone." The revelation was complete for now. Instead of wrath to brace against, they discover nothing but benevolence and the instruction to "listen to Jesus." Not the paper Bible but to Jesus as the Bible reveals him. The story of the Transfiguration ends with "And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen."

"On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Look, a spirit seizes him and, without any warning, he screams. It shakes him and causes him to foam at the mouth. It tortures him and rarely leaves him alone. I begged your disciples to throw it out, but they couldn't."

What is the spirit that seizes the boy? Why aren't the disciples able to cast it out? When Luke speaks of evil spirits or a demon that possesses, I think he is pointing to the influence of other people's voices active in the possessed. We are a network of relationships; some past and some present, that live inside us, though we may not know they are there. These voices begin outside us as the voices of other people and groups but we forget their origin and think they come from within. The voices are multiple, differing and often speaking at the same time. They present a

cacophony of sound making it impossible for us to decide what to think or do. If the conflict is severe as it was with this boy, this spirit tortures him and rarely leaves him alone. Luke and the gospels, being pre-scientific, know something that modern science is only beginning to discover. They correctly intuit a connection between our bodies and our relationships (not our minds, our relationships).

When hearing that the disciples couldn't cast out the evil spirit, "Jesus answered 'You faithless and crooked generation, how long will I be with you and put up with you?'" Jesus, addressing the whole crowd, disciples included, calls them "faithless" and "crooked." He calls them "faithless" because they don't yet have a center to their faith. If who I am is my relationship with all the others that form me; my family, my peers, my history, my enemies, my country and my God or whatever substitutes for that; how do I organize the conflicting voices? How do I determine which voices takes precedence? When we are "faithless" we are at the whim of whatever voice screams the loudest since we have no way to sort it out. The voice from the cloud says "This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!" This gives us the missing center. When a community listens to the Lord of Life, they have a way to sort.

Why then does Jesus say this generation is crooked? The boy with the demon serves as a scapegoat. Humans have always hidden their scapegoats from themselves and that's why Jesus describes them as "crooked." Humans don't want to see the way everything is built on someone being excluded. A majority of Methodists world-wide don't see this. This is the veil Paul speaks of when he writes "a veil lies over their hearts. But whenever someone turns back to the Lord, the veil is removed." The crucifixion and resurrection removed the veil revealing the mechanism that before had been entirely hidden. Being very frustrated by their refusal to see, Jesus asks "how long will I be with you and put up with you?" We know it won't be for much longer since next week is the beginning of Lent.

"'Bring your son here.' While he was coming, the demon threw him down and shook him violently." A voice inside the boy, a voice that came from someone in the boy's network of relationships, a voice that is at odds with what was best for the boy, took possession of his body, threw him down and shook him violently.

"Jesus spoke harshly to the unclean spirit." Voices that do not want what is best for us are deeply embedded. They don't take kindly to being exposed and so Jesus speaks harshly. It's a harshness to match the harshness revealed by the cross. Jesus healed the child and gave him back to his father. "Everyone was overwhelmed by God's greatness." Amen.