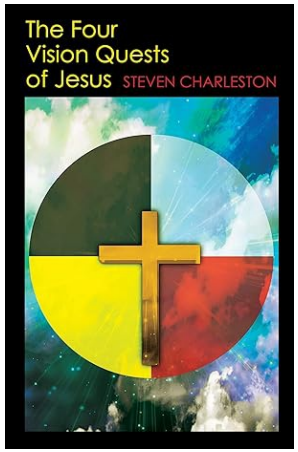
SERMON NOTES — March 2, 2025

In psychological testing for getting a new job, have you ever been asked the question, "Do you hear voices?" You answer "No," right? They would fail you. But our Gospel Reading today tells the common biblical story of people seeing visions and hearing voices. How do we understand this in the context of modern psychology? When is it OK to see visions and hear voices?

Today, I want to introduce us to an indigenous religious tradition called "vision quest." Our main resource will be a book by a Choctaw elder and Episcopalian priest, Steven Charleston. His book is *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus*. We will encounter these four quests from today until Good Friday:



1. Baptism to Temptations in Wilderness
2. The Transfiguration
3. Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane
4. Being executed on the Cross

The four places of vision quest: Wilderness, Mountain, Garden, Cross

Our lectionary has the first two vision quests in reverse order. Interestingly, the Catholic Lectionary places the Transfiguration on the 2nd Sunday in Lent, in precise order. The 3rd and 4th vision quests happen on Holy Thursday and Good Friday

Bringing biblical insights together with those of indigenous traditions of vision quest: Charleston has come to see the Christian faith in the Incarnation of God in Jesus as God's vision quest to enable all human beings to better experience intimacy with God. And this was accomplished through four vision quests of Jesus.

Focusing on today's second vision quest: the Transfiguration on a mountain. Luke uses a different word to describe what happens when they looked upon Jesus' face. Matthew and Mark use the word *metamorph* from which we get our word "transfigure." Luke uses simply the word *heteros*, Other. I believe that this second vision quest of Jesus is about what I experienced at this past year's Synod Assembly, the quest to unite all human beings into one family by seeing in Jesus' face the face of the Other, the face of those oppressed by our human politics of divide-and-conquer.

The other thing I think we can glean by seeing the story of the Transfiguration as a vision quest is the singling out of Jesus from Moses and Elijah, with the voice from heaven saying, "Listen to him!" One of the things Steven Charleston emphasizes is that the aftermath of a vision quest most often leads to *healing*. When the vision quest of God in Jesus the Messiah is seen in terms of uniting the human family against its nationalistic tendencies, by learning to see the face of the Other as our own faces, then it leads to healing. What do nationalistic quests generally lead to? Violent attempts to conquer the Other.

Let's consider, for a moment, what came next when Moses, Elijah, and Jesus came off mountains of vision quests. Moses went up Mt. Sinai to receive the precious covenant from Yahweh that gives the Hebrew people the mission of uniting the human family. A wondrous thing. But when he came down the mountain to find the people of Israel lapsing into worship of a Golden calf, he did lash out in violence to kill the idolaters. Elijah is most famous for winning a battle against 450 priests of Ba'al on Mount Carmel. But when they came off the mountain, Elijah had those 450 priests killed. What do we see from Jesus when he comes down the mountain of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah? He heals a child contorted by the oppression of Empire. In his healing of the child, we begin to see the face of the Other transformed by the healing power of compassion and justice.

Whose are the usual faces of oppression and violence in any time and place? Do we see the face of Jesus today in the faces of the children of Gaza, or Ukraine, or South Sudan? The faces of children whose parents are being deported without them in America right now? The faces of children living in great poverty in any time and place? The poverty created by our nationalistic economics that elevate one group of people over the Other? *This* is the climax of the Epiphany: To learn to see the face of Jesus in the face of the Other. When we follow Jesus off the mountain of a transfiguring vision quest, we are called to same mission, a mission of healing the human family, beginning with the children. Amen