

## Transfiguration Reflections

The Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 2023  
Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Luke 9:28-36  
St. Matthew's, Sunbury; the Reverend Dina Carter Ishler,  
Priest in Charge

*In the name of our God who is Life Abundant,  
Love Overflowing, and Spirit Out-Pouring, Amen.*

It feels like such a gift to have the Feast of the Transfiguration fall on a Sunday this year (which has not happened since 2017) because this means *we will pay attention to it*. Unless we are praying the scriptures assigned for every day of the year, weekdays and Sundays, we are likely to miss the Transfiguration on its actual feast day- today, the 6<sup>th</sup> of August.

We are much more familiar, of course, with experiencing the Transfiguration stories in a very different season- on the last Sunday after the Epiphany- and so this is an incredible opportunity for us to consider

these deeply familiar readings through a different liturgical lens. Then, we are poised on one of the most powerful thresholds of the church year: after our celebration of the Light which came into the world in the Incarnation, that inbreaking of God into our human existence and then the unfolding revelation of this Light during the Epiphany season- and just before we begin the journey into our Lenten spiritual work and what that means for each of us. Although of course the scriptural narrative always remains the same, today we will not immediately turn towards Jerusalem and our own experience of Cross and Resurrection as we are invited to do on that last Sunday after the Epiphany.

Acknowledging that we will come down from the mountaintop and journey onwards in a different way here in the 'long green growing season' of Ordinary Time is part of what will make these readings come alive for us today.

These readings- and our Collect- are woven together by their shared imagery of dazzling divine Light and how the experience of being in this Light changes profoundly any human being who is “overshadowed” by it. Moses comes down from the mountain so changed by being in the presence of God that he is literally shining with the Light he has experienced, almost in an overwhelming way to those who see him. The psalmist’s language describes the glory and the majesty of the Lord which shows itself most truly in justice and in righteousness, and how our own work is that of reverent worship and proclamation because *we ourselves* have known this glory. Peter tells his own experience of the Gospel story as one who “was an eyewitness of this majesty...we ourselves heard the Voice proclaim Jesus ‘my Beloved Son’ while we were with him on the holy mountain.” And then the Gospel tells the transfiguration story from the perspective of the three disciples Jesus brought with him up on the mountain- their fear and awkwardness, their awe and

wonder, at being ‘overshadowed’ with God’s presence, and then their silence “in those days” about the things they had seen and experienced. As they return down the mountain, revelation begins to settle in; nothing about Jesus or themselves or the world they live and do ministry in will ever be the same.

One of my favorite things about the Transfiguration in any season is the almost endless possibilities for deeper reflection it offers us, and this is a favorite theme among lectionary commentators and spiritual writers as well. Much as we did at our outdoor service two weeks ago, I’m going to draw us into a time of contemplation that will invite us more deeply into some truths we can carry with us from today’s readings. This is similar to Centering Prayer, when we gather our souls into a still, holy place where we settle more fully into our awareness of God’s presence. Any questions I ask out loud are completely

rhetorical, just for you to wonder about- we can talk about them later if you like.

**\*Begin by closing your eyes.**

Find as comfortable and upright a position as you can- I know our pews can feel a little hard at times. If you possibly can, please don't use your fans for just a few minutes.

Place your hands either palms-down on your thighs, or link your fingers together to remember we are all connected, or hold them open, palms up, so that blessings may fall into them. Feet flat on the floor.

**\*Pay attention to your breath-** breathe deeply in through your nose and out through your mouth. Deep, cleansing, healing breaths.

**\*Allow any busyness, any worry, any “clutter” inside you to fade into the background** and maybe even vanish completely for these few minutes.

What hardness or tangled places do you need to let go of before you can be truly still?

What goodness or special joy or gratitude will you carry into this space?

**\*I want you to put yourself into the transfiguration story- to imagine that you traveled with Jesus on the journey up the mountain, and that you saw all kinds of amazing, almost unbelievable things while you were up there.** You saw Jesus’ appearance completely change and his clothes become dazzling white. You saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. You tried to make things seem a little more normal by offering to construct dwellings for each of them to inhabit and as you were speaking, you and your companions were absolutely terrified by a cloud that came in and completely

overshadowed you, as if it became part of you. You heard a voice from within the cloud proclaim that Jesus is God's Son, God's Chosen- and then you were alone with Jesus again.

**\*Imagine now that you are going back down this mountain and must find a way to live your life forever changed, transfigured even, by the things you saw and heard and experienced while on the mountaintop. For one shining moment the veil between earth and heaven was drawn aside and you stood on the threshold - you were overshadowed by the radiance of the Eternal and Triune God and so you cannot possibly be the same as you were before.**

**\*Bring to your mind a 'mountaintop' kind of experience you've had that was so wonderful you were tempted to stay there, lost in the wonder of it.**

(EXAMPLES) Remember how it felt to be so fully in the

presence of God that you never wanted to leave that place or have that moment or that season end. Hold this experience close, as if you were holding it in a loving embrace. Savor it for the true blessing that it is.

**\*Be honest with yourself about how you'd like to stay right there-** to build a dwelling that could hold and protect it, a place where you could stay forever in the clarity of your experience. Acknowledge to yourself that this would feel beautiful and cozy and safe.

**\*Now accept that you cannot stay here- that you must come down off the mountaintop and return to level ground.** Your experience is calling you to bring **back** the blessings of your changed self into a world that needs all the light that flowed from the radiance of God's presence and filled your being.



**\*Imagine what blessings you want to take with you when you go.** Might they be joy? Gratitude? Wonder at being so fully in God's presence? A sense of healing that you have been longing for? Connection with those who shared this experience with you? Longing to share the gifts of this experience with others when the time is right? *Ask yourself: What has changed about me that I want to bring back as I leave this space and travel onwards?*

**\*Imagine beginning the descent- the journey down from the mountaintop heights of your experience.** Remember again what you want to take with you- allow yourself to believe that it really is possible. Go slowly- there is no rush. Be gentle with your feelings- you may be both sorry and excited to leave the mountaintop and travel onwards. You may want to tell the whole world about your experience and know you need a little more time. Remind yourself that you brought all the blessings, all the gifts and graces of your experience with you- they are part

of you now. *Remind yourself that you have what you need to live out of this experience for the rest of your life.*

**\*Take a moment to come out of this place of silence and holiness.** Open your eyes only when you're ready- maybe stretch a little. Keep breathing your deep, even breaths. It's only natural that we might want to stay in these places where we are so certain of God's presence, but we cannot- because following God means traveling onwards. When we journey into places where God does not seem as visible to us, we remember that we have brought the blessings of the mountaintop back with us and they will be our guide. We will know both places of dazzling light and dense darkness in our lives, but the gift of our sureness of God's presence always with us will never leave us. *Amen.*

