

“Master,” Peter said to Jesus, “it is good for us to be here.” This passage comes exactly at the center of Luke’s Gospel, just eight days after Jesus has told his followers that he will be killed and resurrected. “It is good for us to be here.” Jesus has taken Peter, John and James—his three closest male friends—up a mountain, but only Luke provides the detail that he took them up the mountain with him specifically to pray. “It is good,” in fact, Luke’s Greek word more closely translates as “it is *ideal* for us to be here.”

Through the first half of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus has been preaching in Judah and beside the Galilee, proclaiming the coming of God’s kingdom and teaching people how to receive it. Except for a small number of flawed but loyal disciples and apostles, interest for his teaching has not impressed the majority of Judeans and Galileans. Some who were initially intrigued by miracles have moved on to other interests. Jesus has lost a few disciples and the Pharisees and Sadducees are working more actively against him. Where he has been accepted, people think of him as a prophet and not as the Messiah. Only suffering and death on the cross remain for him.

Imagine what must have been on the hearts and minds of Jesus and his three friends as they hiked up a mountain to pray away from all the rest of the people and their fickle attention. Jesus had a human heart that was vulnerable to all our emotions. He and his three friends could very well have carried up that lonely mountainside feelings of pain over the people’s ingratitude, hard-heartedness and disbelief. Surely, they were pondering the coming passion with anxiety and sadness.

Jesus brought all that to prayer—to pray to his Abba on behalf of the people, for his followers and for his own strength and renewal. And as he prayed, Peter, John and James experienced something astonishing. “The appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

Mark and Matthew’s versions of this story say that: “he was transfigured before them” and Matthew’s Greek text says that his clothes became “white as light.” Up to this point, either his followers have either just not seen this glory or it has been hidden, although a few more discerning hearts have noticed *something* of this presence. Elizabeth noticed something in the way that Mary was carrying the unborn Christ-child. Simeon saw in Jesus, the young man, “a light to enlighten the nations.” But in *this* moment on the mountaintop, nothing is withheld. God’s light—God’s glory—now floods Jesus’

human body until it spills beyond its boundaries and radiates for the apostles to see.

Take a moment to drink in that image: Jesus, radiating a dazzling light. Light in the physical world is what connects us to the universe. Light allows us to experience distant stars and look back at the beginning of creation itself. But we don't so much see *light* as we see the world that light illuminates for us. Or we see the source of the light itself.

Can we say anything less about the Divine light of God's glory?

The transfiguration is a stunning experience of God's radiant presence made manifest in the lives of humans. The events of the transfiguration unfold dynamically with no separation between the Divine and the human. The presence of God's glory allows us to experience the ancients themselves and the Creator of all that is. What we once thought of as heavenly reality is made earthly reality.

Within the light of God's glory, the three see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah about his impending suffering and death on the cross. And as the two sainted patrons of Judaism depart, Peter speaks without being aware of what he is saying: "Master, it is ideal for us to be here."

And why not! Peter and his friends have experienced an illuminating glory shared. A glory that strengthens trust in God and that embraces the teachings of the past while opening into a future bursting with new meaning. No wonder Peter wants to build tabernacles to anchor, hold and spread the experience.

But as Peter is suggesting his building program, God overshadows them in a cloud—a cloud perhaps not entirely unlike the cloud of incense that will shortly embrace our altar. As Peter, James and John are swallowed with Jesus by the cloud, the voice of God affirms that Jesus is the Chosen One. And then they are alone with Jesus. They are alone with Jesus who has gone through a radical shift that caused him to radiate the glory of God, as our hymn put it, "brighter than the sun."

But like the light from the sun, the light from the transfigured Christ has also reflected from the faces of his friends who also are forever changed by the experience. With enough exposure, they too will come to glow with the light of God's glory. But for now, we leave Peter, James and John in appropriate silence having tasted the mystery of God.

The transfiguration will reinvigorate Jesus to go back to the people and continue his ministry until his death, resurrection and ascension. In fact, the very next day Jesus will find himself once again surrounded by a crowd. A

man will ask Jesus to heal a son whom the disciples have been unable to free from a demon. With an aside that seems to express exasperation with followers who appear unprepared to respond to the needs of God's children, Jesus will heal the boy and the people will once again be astounded at the greatness of God.

In time, the light from transfiguration of Christ *reflecting* from the faces of his followers will become light *radiating* from them—even, with practice and God's help, from you and me. You see, the transfiguration of Jesus Christ transcends all time and space. Transfiguration experiences are available to you and to me.

Luke is writing to people in his community and to all future generations of people who are ready for a deeper engagement with their faith. Luke's Gospel is for those who have had a taste of God's glory that they are beginning to trust, but who want to trust more, to understand more deeply within their own hearts, minds and bodies.

The transfiguration is more than an event in the life of Jesus Christ. It conveys a joyous message throughout all time and for all people: that God is accessible; that God shares life with us; that we can seek the glory of God. And it is the hand of our beloved Christ, God's Chosen One, that will lead us up God's mountain and back down to God's people to serve God in them.

That's why we gather here each Sunday. And it is, as Peter said, ideal for us to be here. Peter was not wrong, he just got his priorities a little out of order on the top of that mountain. Having a place to go where you can expect a transfiguring experience is good. In fact, there is now a gorgeous Franciscan church on one of the traditional sites of the transfiguration of Christ with one chapel dedicated to Moses and another to Elijah.

But the *place* is secondary. We gather each Sunday for the primary purpose of entering the cloud of God's glory as a community of God's children. We gather to pray, to listen to the Word and to sit in silent awe before the mystery. We gather to ponder the meaning of the cross, to offer our gifts to God and to receive the presence of Christ into our own bodies. We gather in the presence of God's glory to be transfigured and filled with the light of Christ which we empty out in service to others.

Worship is never a *retreat* from the world. Worship is an *advance* into the heart of God's Chosen One. Reflecting or radiating the Divine light of Christ, we go back to the world with love and mercy and grace streaming out of us with every step we take.

It is ideal for us to be here, is it not?

---

Works consulted:

Rahner, Karl, S.J.. *The Great Church Year: The Best of Karl Rahner's Homilies, Sermons, and Meditations*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.