Transfiguration Sunday

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Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

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Harmony of Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36a

After six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves to pray. And as he was praying, he was transfigured before them. The appearance of his countenance was altered (his face shone like the sun) and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them, And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they wakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"- For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. A bright cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son, my Chosen, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. And suddenly looking around they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

You find yourself delighted, and surprised, to be singled out.

You were one of eight children, not the youngest, but kind of lost among the younger group. You remember that one time when your mother and father were out working the garden, and you decided to bring them each a cup of water without asking. You still remember the smile on your mother’s face, and the way she looked at your father as if to say, this is a good kid, and then your father reaching down and tousling your hair. And then seeing him smile.

Like your father, and his father, you grew up to be a fisherman, and you worked hard like they did, and as did your fellow workers. You married. You were glad for your life, but you wondered if going down to the water every day was all there was to life. Of course, you went to synagogue, and you praised the Creator of the universe, but was there anything more?

And then one day, your brother, with whom you have always been close, with whom you have often discussed life and God and meaning as you worked the boats together, tells you that he’s found the Messiah.

And then you met him yourself, and he called you a rock, and that confused you. Later, he came to you as you and your brother were fishing and he told you to follow him; you weren’t going to be fishermen any more, but men-fishers. You were still confused, but something told you he was the real thing, and, just like that, your dropped your fishing nets and did what he told you. You followed him as many were doing.

Later, of all those who were also following him, he chose twelve. You were delighted, and surprised to be included. You weren’t surprised that your brother was included; he was always the good sort, and, after all, he had introduced you. How you loved those times of intimacy when it was just the twelve of you and him! Large crowds were hard work; you were getting better at it, but when you were able to draw away to pray and receive personal lessons, that was everything, even if you were so tired at times you simply fell asleep.

And then, you are singled out along with John and James, to climb up to the top of Mt Tabor. You’re not sure why you three, why you, why Andrew didn’t go too, or in your place. But you don’t spend much time wondering about that. He wants to go up to pray, and you’re not sure you’re up to it.

You make the steep climb up the mountain and reach the top. You can see in all directions; you see the water you used to fish. You can see the village you grew up in, Bethsaida.

It’s a long climb. In fact, as is all too common, you three fall asleep.

You all wake up to the sound of people talking. You all wake up because there is so much light.

You look at him. You first notice his clothes. Like you, he wears simple garb. But they have been changed in ways you cannot possibly understand. They glisten; they glow; they shine. You have seen clothes bleached white before, but this is nothing like that; they are not just white, they are pouring out a light of their own.

You then notice his face. If his clothes are glowing, his face, normally just the face of a kind and wise man, is glowing even more furiously than his clothes; his face burns like the sun. It hurts to look at him.

And then you see who he is talking to. You know deep in your heart who these two men are. Moses, who stood on his own mountain, talking to God, receiving God’s law, his face taking on the same kind of furious light. Elijah, the great prophet who left the earth in a chariot of fire and glory, and who was to return before Messiah.

What are they talking about?

You are overcome, what are you doing here? Can you make them a shelter, you ask, more out of fear than anything. But you see a cloud approaching. It obscures your view, but it shines with its own light. Fear grips you even more fully as the cloud surrounds you all.

A voice comes from the cloud, a voice that seems to fill the cloud; it doesn’t boom, but it is unmistakable and you are aware of nothing else.

The voice says, “This is my beloved Son.”

The voice says, “This is my Chosen One.”

The voice says, “I am very pleased with him.”

The voice says, “Listen to him.”

You and John and James fall on your faces. Just as you knew that this man was the Messiah, just as you knew that this was Moses and Elijah, you know whose voice this is.

What are you doing here? How long will it go on? Will you be able to endure it?

Suddenly, the cloud is gone. Moses and Elijah are gone. John and James are still here, but you only have eyes for him, no longer so radiant, but somehow even more profound and weighty and full of glory.

“Don’t tell anyone yet about this until I rise from the dead.” You have a secret to keep, even from the others, even from Andrew, not even quite understanding what that secret is.

How do you feel? You came *that close* to running away because the light seemed to burn. When you fell on your face, you felt the fire of that light touching and beginning to burn away those shameful things you try to hide from others, and you felt shame at carrying those things. You could not have stood such intense scrutiny for long. You feel worn out, but at the same time energized. If you had any doubts before about whether this was Messiah, they are gone now, confirmed by cloud and fire, confirmed by Moses and Elijah, confirmed by the very voice of God.

You feel: Glory, glory. Glory.