

“The Son of God”

The Rev. Drew Willard
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Transfiguration Sun.
Seminaries/Church Voc.

Exodus 3:1-6,9-14

1st Kings 18:20-24

Matthew 17:1-9

*When the LORD saw that [Moses] turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush,
“Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here am I.”*

Exodus 3:4

And Eli’jah came near to all the people, and said,

“How long will you go limping with two different opinions?

If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Ba’al, then follow him.”

And the people did not answer him a word.

1st Kings 18:20-24

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to be aware of your love when you show up in our lives,
and help us to keep looking for you when it seems like we are alone.

Help us to see you at work in the example of other people’s lives,
and help each of us to be an example of who you are, as we live our lives.

Amen

Transfiguration Sunday is the last Sunday in Epiphany –

which celebrates the manifestation of Christ as the Son of God.

Generally, this is about how human beings witnessed and recognized
the divine identity of Jesus’ of Nazareth as something more
than a mortal human being.

The principal Bible stories about this are

the Christmas narrative of the Three Wise Men

who seek and find the Christ Child in Bethlehem,

as well as Jesus’ baptism by John in the Jordan

where there is a ‘theophany’ in which God speaks,

affirming Jesus as the beloved Son of God.

Once again, God speaks – this time to Peter, James, and John

on the Mount of Transfiguration – again, affirming Jesus’ identity,

but also the mandate to listen to him, to trust him, to believe him...

The Transfiguration story is very brief, and seems oddly placed

in the middle of the three synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

‘Synoptic’ is a Greek word that basically means to “see together”

and Biblical researchers have placed these narratives side by side,

primarily following the sequence of events found in Mark

and comparing phrases in Matthew and Luke,

for how they are similar or differ.

Willard, p.2

The Gospel of John is also represented when there are similar references even though their sequence and phrases in Greek differ from the Synoptics. For example, even though the Transfiguration does not appear in John as an event, it is suggested in the first chapter of John, verse 14:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

The Synopsis of the Four Gospels, edited by Kurt Aland

was the most important resource I found during my seminary training.

One of the reasons was that it allowed me to see how stories were connected and how those connections compared in each of the Gospels.

In church each Sunday, I grew up hearing the Bible narratives as separate stories and not really knowing what came before or what followed.

With the aid of the synoptics, I was able to make those connections and see themes emerge.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is preceded by

the death of John the Baptist, the feeding the 5,000,

Jesus walking on water, and Peter's declaration that Jesus as the Messiah – the Anointed One, the Christ.

That comes about while Jesus and his disciples

are walking along a road in northern Israel, when he asks them,

“Who do people say that I am?” and they tell him;

But then he puts the question to them and Peter responds saying...

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:16^b

However, Jesus then tells them what that will mean –

it is a “promise”, both terrible and wonderful:

“The Son of man must suffer many things, and

be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Mark 9:22^b

Peter says, “No, not you!” but then Jesus tells him,

‘Get behind me, Satan!’, denounces Peter as an enemy

which is what the word ‘Satan’ means,

because Jesus was not going to let friend or foe deflect him from his task.

Like Moses who confronted the fearsome military and magical powers of Egypt, and Elijah who confronted the spiritual powers of his own nation's corrupt leaders,

so Jesus would face the malice of

Roman domination and Herodian complicity.

Yet Jesus would be their victim, their scapegoat to preserve order...

Willard, p. 3

It is at this point that Jesus calls for his disciples to see beyond
the futility of such a confrontation.

He calls them to be willing to carry the cross of their own responsibility
for this quest of human liberation and social transformation.

He calls them to trust that he is from beyond the limitations of this world
and comes from the power of what is true, healing, and life-giving –
that his name, ‘Jesus’ – ‘YHWH saves’ means just that.

So he leads his trusted leaders up a mountain
where they witness Jesus transfigured – or as I like to think of it,
metamorphosized like a butterfly– to reveal who he really is in glory.

Grace – or mercy, is the taste of heaven we get now and then,
to keep us going on this journey of life, and
Peter, James, and John were graced with this vision
of what lies ahead, the glory of that Kingdom
that can only be hinted at otherwise with parables.

The disciples want to stay up there on that mountaintop;
They want to build shrines so they can remember what they’ve seen;
They don’t really don’t know what to say, because they are terrified and enthused –
caught up “in God” at the same time.

The version of the Transfiguration from Mark 9 is one of the first Bible stories
I learned to tell and because of the “Synoptics”, it will always be linked for me
with the story that follows – the Healing of the Epileptic Boy.

[Show slide]

These stories together, provide an important icon for me
of who Jesus is – and what he does and says as an example for us all to follow.

As much as I want to stay on the mountaintop,
I have always had to come back down to the valley.
That is what Jesus did and challenged his disciples to do.
That is where the work is.

His example best represents the character of our God,
whose holiness cannot be contaminated in its confrontation
with deadly disease, destitution, and demonization.

I will close with these two stories –
as I have interpreted them from Mark 9:2^b-29,
a word portrait – an icon, for the character of God through Christ...

Willard, p.4
Inspired by Mark 9:2^b-29

JESUS TOOK WITH HIM PETER THE ROCK, JAMES, & JOHN
AND LED THEM HIGH UP A MOUNTAIN
WHERE THEY COULD BE IN SOLITUDE...

AND HE WAS TRANSFIGURED BEFORE THEM –
METAMORPHOSIZED BEFORE THEM,
HIS GARMENTS BECAME RADIANT, DAZZLING WHITE,
WHITER THAN ANYTHING ON EARTH COULD WHITEN.
THEN, THEY SAW... MOSES & ELIJAH!
AND THEY WERE CONFERRING WITH JESUS!

AND PETER THE ROCK SAID TO JESUS,
“LORD,
IT IS WONDERFUL THAT WE ARE HERE!
WE WILL MAKE THREE SHRINES:
ONE FOR YOU, AND ONE FOR MOSES, AND ONE FOR ELIJAH!”
HE DID NOT KNOW HOW ELSE TO RESPOND, FOR THEY WERE TERRIFIED.

AND A CLOUD CAME, OVERSHADOWING THEM,
AND A VOICE CAME FROM THE CLOUD,
*“THIS IS ONE WHO COMES FROM ME!
THIS IS ONE WHO IS BELOVED! LISTEN TO HIM!”*

AND SUDDENLY, LOOKING AROUND
THEY SAW NO ONE ELSE, BUT... JESUS, ONLY.

AS THEY WERE COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN, HE URGED THEM,
“SAY NOTHING OF WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN
UNTIL THE SON OF MAN, THE TRUE HEIR OF HUMANITY,
HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD.”

WELL, THEY KEPT THE MATTER TO THEMSELVES,
BUT DEBATED ABOUT WHAT THE “RISING FROM THE DEAD” MEANT.
SO, THEY ASKED HIM,
“WHY DO THE RELIGIOUS EXPERTS SAY THAT
FIRST, ELIJAH MUST COME?”

Willard, p.5

SO HE TOLD THEM,

“ELIJAH DOES COME FIRST, TO RENEW ALL THINGS...

[aside] *YET HOW IS IT WRITTEN OF*

THE SON OF MAN, THE TRUE HEIR OF HUMANITY,

THAT HE MUST SUFFER MANY THINGS

AND BE TREATED WITH CONTEMPT?

“BUT I TELL YOU,

ELIJAH HAS ALREADY COME...

[aside] *AND THEY DID TO HIM WHATEVER THEY WISHED,*

FOR SO IT IS WRITTEN OF HIM.”

AND THEY CAME TO WHERE

THE OTHER DISCIPLES WERE WAITING

AND SAW THAT A LARGE CROWD

HAD GATHERED AROUND THEM AS THEY ARGUED

WITH SOME OF THOSE RELIGIOUS EXPERTS.

WHEN THEY SAW THAT IT WAS JESUS, THEY WERE SURPRISED.

AND RAN UP TO HIM AND GREETED HIM.

THEN, JESUS ASKED THEM,

“WHAT WERE YOU DISCUSSING WITH THEM?”

AND A MAN ANSWERED HIM FROM THE CROWD,

“RABBI, TEACHER,

I BROUGHT MY SON TO YOU BECAUSE

HE HAS A VOICE-STEALING SPIRIT.

AND WHENEVER IT SEIZES HIM,

IT DASHES HIM TO THE GROUND.

AND HE FOAMS AT THE MOUTH,

GRINDS HIS TEETH, AND BECOMES RIGID.

AND I ASKED YOUR DISCIPLES

TO CAST IT OUT, BUT THEY COULD NOT!”

BUT JESUS RESPONDED, SAYING,

“O GENERATION OF THE FAITHLESS!

HOW LONG SHALL I BE WITH YOU?

HOW LONG SHALL I... BEAR WITH YOU?

BRING THE BOY TO ME!”

SO THEY BROUGHT THE CHILD TO HIM.

AND WHEN THE SPIRIT SAW THAT IT WAS JESUS,

IT CONVULSED THE BOY, WHO FELL ON THE GROUND,

ROLLING ALL AROUND AND FOAMING AT THE MOUTH!

AND JESUS ASKED THE FATHER,

“HOW LONG HAS HE HAD THIS?”

Willard, p.6

AND THE MAN SAID,

“SINCE CHILDHOOD! AND WHENEVER IT SEIZES HIM,
IT THROWS HIM DOWN INTO FIRE OR INTO WATER TO KILL HIM !
OH, IF YOU CAN DO ANYTHING, HAVE MERCY AND HELP US!”

AND JESUS SAID,

“IF YOU CAN? ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE
TO THE ONE WHO BELIEVES!”

IMMEDIATELY, THE FATHER OF THE CHILD

CRIED OUT WITH TEARS,

“I BELIEVE. HELP MY UNBELIEF!”

SEEING THE CROWD GATHER TOGETHER,

JESUS SCORNE THE EVIL SPIRIT, SAYING,

“YOU, DEMON! THIEF OF SPEECH AND HEARING,
I COMMAND YOU:

COME OUT OF HIM AND NEVER COME BACK!”

AND IT CRIED OUT, CONVULSING THE BOY TERRIBLY,

AND IT... CAME OUT.

BUT THE CHILD NOW WAS LIKE A CORPSE, AND THE PEOPLE SAID,

“OH, HE’S DEAD!”

BUT JESUS TOOK HIM BY THE HAND AND LIFTED HIM UP...

AND THE CHILD GOT UP!

LATER AS THEY WERE GOING INTO THE FAMILY’S HOME TO CELEBRATE,

HIS DISCIPLES ASKED HIM – DISCREETLY,

“WHY COULD WE NOT CAST IT OUT?”

AND JESUS SAID TO THEM,

“SUCH AN ENEMY AS THIS CANNOT BE DRIVEN OUT BY ANYTHING,
EXCEPT PRAYER & FASTING – FAITH & HARD WORK!”

When you resolve to pray, even despite times of ‘unbelief’,
you are demonstrating your faith;

and when you are not eating because you are working hard
at making yourself a better person and the world a better place
then you are fasting in the form of an active prayer –
just like Jesus.

Amen

Our lesson today from Exodus 3:1-6,9-14 tells about how Moses was called to serve God and lead the Hebrew people out of bondage in Egypt by first confronting Pharaoh...

¹Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Mid'ian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

²And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

³And Moses said,

“I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.”

⁴When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here am I.”

⁵Then [the LORD] said,

“Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

⁶And [the LORD] said,

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

[The LORD said,]

⁹And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

¹⁰Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”

¹¹But Moses said to God,

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the [children] of Israel out of Egypt?”

¹²[The LORD] said,

“But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain.”

¹³Then Moses said to God,

“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”

¹⁴God said to Moses,

“I AM WHO I AM” ... Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Our lesson from 1st Kings 18:20-24 is about how the Prophet Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal to discredit their god as a fake idol before the people of Israel...

²⁰ So [King] Ahab sent to all the people of Israel,
and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

²¹ And Eli'jah came near to all the people, and said,
“How long will you go limping with two different opinions?
If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Ba'al, then follow him.”
And the people did not answer him a word.

²² Then Eli'jah said to the people,
“I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD;
but Ba'al's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

²³ Let two bulls be given to us; and let them choose one bull for themselves,
and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it;
and I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood,
and put no fire to it.

²⁴ And you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the LORD;
and the God who answers by fire, he is God.”

And all the people answered, “It is well spoken.”

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Matthew 17:1-9

¹And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart.

²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light.

³And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Eli'jah, talking with him.

⁴And Peter said to Jesus,

“Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah.”

⁵He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said,

“This is my beloved Son,^[a] with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe.

⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying,

“Rise, and have no fear.”

⁸And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

⁹And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them,

“Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead.”