

March 2, 2025, Sermon Luke 9: 28-36 (37-43a)

“Transformed So That We Can Become Like God”

“ Not knowing what he said, Peter was still speaking when a cloud overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

I’m supposed to point the finger at Peter and say something about his episode of yet another example of obtuse, dunder-tongued Peter getting under Jesus’ skin. I’m expected to scold Peter for wanting to preserve this spiritual, mountaintop experience. *“Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”* Was Peter right in saying this?

On the one hand, I can speak from Peter’s foolish gesture to the observation that discipleship isn’t about adoring glory or mountaintop experiences; no, it’s about going back down the mountain, into the grit and the grunge of everyday life, where we can feed the hungry and cloth the naked.

Or rather than pivot to the poor, I can keep the sermon focused on Peter. I can encourage us to identify with Peter, the disciple whose mouth is always quicker than his mind and whose ambition never measures up to his courage. I could preach Peter to you and comfort you that Peter’s just like us: a foolish, imperfect follower who fails at his faith as often as he gets it right. And, yet Jesus loves him (and you and me) and builds his church on him. I am not sure what direction to take.

Go back down the mountaintop, back into ‘real life.’ Or look at Peter—he’s just like you and me. What direction should I go? What is the passage speaking to me now?

An observation, Peter always manages to get it wrong, then when Peter professes, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah,” why doesn’t Jesus correct him? Why doesn’t he

tell Peter 'No to the building of the tents, it is good for us to go back down the mountain to serve the least, the lost, and the lonely?' In fact, here on the mountaintop, it's the only instance in any of the Gospels where Jesus doesn't respond at all to something someone has said to him. This is the only instance where Jesus doesn't respond.

I wonder: what if Jesus doesn't respond because Peter's right?

German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, an awesomely bearded 19th century critic of religion, accused Christians that all our theology is only anthropology. Rather than talking about God, as we claim, we're in fact only speaking about ourselves in a loud voice, projecting our human desires and fantasies on humanity, and is not true of God.

There's perhaps no better proof of Feuerbach's accusation than our propensity to make Peter the point of this scripture. To make this theophany, his encounter with God, anthropology. To transfigure this story into something ordinary. Just think, what would Peter make of the fact that we make Peter the subject of this text? Which is but a way making ourselves the focus of this story.

Don't forget that this is the same Peter who insisted that he was not worthy to die in the same manner as Christ and so asked to be crucified upside down. Peter would know that he should not be the subject of our sermons. Peter would know that he's not the one we should be looking at in this scene.

Second observation: Jesus does not respond because what Peter gets right, even if he doesn't know exactly what he's saying, is that gazing upon Christ, who is charged with the uncreated light of God, *is* good? Not only is it good, but it is also the very heart of discipleship.

This image of the transfigured Christ Peter sees the life of all lives flash before his eyes. In one instant of transfigured clarity, Peter sees the humanity of Jesus joined with the eternal glory of God, and in that instant Peter glimpse the mystery of our faith: that God became human so that humanity might become like God. This is where the good news is to be found. Not in Peter being as dumb or scared as you and me. Not in a

message like 'serve the poor' that you would still agree to do even if you didn't know Christ. The good news is found in the same glory that transfigured the face of Moses and dwelt in the Temple and rested upon the ark and overshadowed Mary pervading even Jesus's humanity and, one day, ours. That's what the passage is speaking to me this morning. God became like us, that's what Peter sees, so that we might become like God, that's what I believe Peter eventually learns.

The light shining from Jesus' flesh is the same light that declared 'Let there be light...' It is the light awaited by the world, as Apostle Paul mentions with groaning, labor pains, and sighs too deep for words in Romans 8:22. It's the light that will one day make all of creation a burning bush, afire with God's glory but not consumed by it.

Peter's right. It is right and good, always and everywhere, to worship and adore God became man, and, in seeing him, to see ourselves taken up into that same glory.

It is right and good, always and everywhere, to anticipate our flesh being remade into God's image so that we may be united with God. This is the essence of Christian faith. Jesus has come to reveal God and redeem humanity. God speaks of Jesus as the Chosen One, and we need to listen to him.

It is right and good, always and everywhere, for just as Christ's humanity is transfigured by glory without ceasing to be human so too will our humanity be called into union with God, to be deified, without our ceasing to be creatures. That's the mystery of our faith. It's not about going back down the mountain. Rather the entire Christian life is a sort of ascent, venturing further and further up the mountain, to worship and adore the transfigured Christ and, in so doing, to be transfigured ourselves. If we're not transformed, what's the point of going back down the mountain? We'd be down there, no different than anyone else, which leaves the world no different than it's always been.

What Peter gets wrong is thinking he needs to build *three* tabernacles. Elijah and Moses maybe could've used them, but not Jesus. Jesus' flesh, his humanity, is the tabernacle. Amen.

