

## *The Last Sunday after the Epiphany “Transfigured!”*

*2Kgs 2:1-12; Ps 50:1-6; 2 Cor 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9*

This is the Last Sunday in the Season after the Epiphany. From here, Jesus will leave his Galilean ministry and head toward Jerusalem and the Cross. Likewise, we will leave the Season of Epiphany, the revelation of Jesus as the living, incarnate God *With Us— Immanuel*, and we will head into Ash Wednesday and the penitential Season of Lent.

On this Last Sunday after the Epiphany, we always hear the story of Elijah taken up into heaven paired with the glorious mountaintop Transfiguration of Jesus. The Transfiguration occurs six days after Peter’s confession that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah of God. Jesus then responded to Peter by predicting his own impending death and resurrection. Jesus is aware that his ministry will be denounced and rejected. His disciples must be prepared for that eventuality and be made aware that *there is a glory that even death cannot suppress*. The disciples will discover that the glory of God is revealed in the Cross. Throughout the Season of Lent, we are reminded that our exalted Lord is never separate from the suffering Christ.

However, sometimes we can get so caught up in the biblical story that we easily forget the *why* of the story. Why did God become flesh in the person of Jesus? Why did Jesus come among us? Why did Jesus have to die? In simplest terms: Jesus died to save us from the flaw, the crack, that had developed in our human nature, a crack that started with the sin of disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Jesus came not only to repair that crack, that flaw in our humanity, but also to remind us just how beautiful and beloved we are to God. What do I mean by that? Well, sometimes a simple story can express this best:

Once upon a time, there once was a king in a small kingdom whose royal family had always owned a flawless, perfect diamond. The king kept the beautiful diamond on guarded display for all of his people to see and admire. His people would come to behold this beautiful work of nature and in their own way each would feel a sense of pride, dignity, and worth. One day, a soldier came to tell the king that the diamond was cracked. Although it had been faithfully guarded night and day, there was a crack, a major flaw, running through the middle of this once beautiful diamond.

The king and all of his people were greatly distraught. The king summoned the kingdom’s jewelers but every jeweler said that the diamond was irreparably cracked. It was now flawed. The king felt he had let down the countless ancestors before him. The people felt just as crushed. They too felt they had lost everything.

Then an old man came and pronounced that he could repair the precious gem and make it even better, even more beautiful than before. The king reluctantly agreed to let the old man have the precious jewel. A week later, the old man returned the diamond. The king could not believe his eyes. The jewel truly was more beautiful than before! The old man had used that flaw, the crack that ran down the middle of the stone. He had used the crack to form the stem of a rose. He had painstakingly carved an intricate, full-blown rose, complete with leaves and thorns, onto the diamond’s surface.

The King was overwhelmed with joy and offered the old man half of his kingdom, since he had taken something once beautiful and made it into something even more exquisite. But the old man refused saying, “I didn’t do that at all. *What I did was take something flawed and cracked at its heart and turned into something beautiful.*”<sup>1</sup>

Well, in creation, God made us to be beautiful, loving, generous, and kind. But our willful disobedience formed a crack in our beautiful nature, often making us jealous, envious, spiteful, and mean. And that crack in our nature leads only to death. But our God is an awesome, mighty God who could not abide our painful fall, so God sent a Son to fill that crack in our nature with God's own light. Or, as the legendary songwriter and poet, Leonard Cohen once so poetically wrote:

“There is a crack, a crack in everything. (But) That is how the light gets in.”

God is light. Jesus is that light. Jesus came into the world to be that transforming light; to transfigure flawed beauty and to make it more exquisite. Jesus came to transform that irreparable flaw and crack in all of us. He came to transform it into something beautiful.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is a foretaste, a divine glimpse, of the wondrous union of the divine and human. The Transfiguration reminds us that the painful, crooked path to the cross still leads to a glory that not even death can overcome. It is a foretaste of the glory that awaits all Christian disciples who faithfully follow and believe that Jesus is Lord. The Transfiguration offers a foretaste of the transfiguration of our own flaws into the beautiful light of which we were made.

*“Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty, God reveals himself in glory.” Ps 50:2*

## **What are the implications and meanings for *you* in today's readings?**

1. Imagine if you were there on that holy mountaintop along with Peter, James, and John.
  - a. How do you think you would have reacted to the Transfigured glory of Jesus? Would you be awed, terrified, and/or overwhelmed?
2. The disciples on the mountain clearly recognized Moses and Elijah, yet those two men lived millennia before the disciples and there are no drawings or depictions of these two great figures of Jewish history.
  - a. How do you think the disciples recognized Moses and Elijah?
  - b. Do you think you would know who these two great biblical figures were if you'd been there?
3. Peter said he wanted to make “dwellings” for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.
  - a. Reflect upon what Peter was asking. Why do you think he suggested this?
  - b. Reflect upon what it might mean to dwell with or abide with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

### **For the Biblical Scholars**

- Moses and Elijah appearing alongside Jesus is clearly significant. What are they generally considered to represent? Why are these two men so important to this Transfiguration moment?
- Why do you think Jesus forbade Peter, James, and John from telling anyone about the Transfiguration at that time [9:9]?
- In our Old Testament reading, why does Elisha ask to “inherit a double share of Elijah's spirit”? What does that mean? [2Kgs 2:9]

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<sup>i</sup> Transfiguration Story from Megan McKenna, *Send My Roots Rain: A Spirituality of Justice and Mercy*; NY: Doubleday, 2003