THE NEW SHOFAR

"Christlikeness is not produced by imitation, but by inhabitation."
— Rick Warren,

March 1st

The Transfiguration as Model for Ministry

Sometimes, something major happens in the world or in the community and the Sundary readings do not seem to match. It's hard to celebrate a major church holiday, when major suffering and injustice has broken out somewhere and the eyes of the world are focused there. So how could the transfiguration of Jesus speak into our lives?

One thing I love about Christianity is that there is always something to celebrate, something for which we should be truly grateful. That is partly because the good news of Jesus is made better by the bad news that comes before it. So before we get to Easter, we have to go through Good Friday. The joy of Christianity happens in a fallen world. The good news of Jesus gives beauty to our sorrows, and the suffering of Jesus infuses our celebration with greater meaning. The transfiguration is not just a moment to celebrate. It's a moment that gives clarity to the rest of Scripture and to our lives.

What the transfiguration tell us about God

At the transfiguration, something about Jesus is revealed. His humanity is not diminished but something more is revealed. In that moment, Jesus does not perform a sign or a miracle, because he IS the sign and the miracle. What is he the sign of? He's revealed a true picture of who he really is, a picture of his divinity. From the transfiguration onward, the appearance of the incarnate, human Jesus can be seen as an icon, a symbol or window into the spiritual reality he represents. The human Jesus is shown to be the divine Son of God. Anything that this person does, God himself is doing.

God the Father speaks at the transfiguration. "*This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him!"* God the Father himself is backing Jesus' ministry. When we reflect on the transfiguration, we should see a link back to Jesus' baptism, when the voice of the Father affirms Jesus and his ministry. Now, we see a reaffirmation of Jesus, that God was not kidding at his baptism. Everything that the earthly Jesus has done up to this point has been done by the human Jesus who was also the divine Son of God.

And just as God's appearance at Jesus' baptism commissioned his ministry, God's appearance at the transfiguration propels Jesus forward into the final act of his earthly ministry, blessing and affirming Jesus' road back to Jerusalem, and ultimately, the cross.

What else does the transfiguration tell us about God, and specifically God the Son? We see the quintessential representative of the Law, Moses, and of the Prophets, Elijah, serving as witnesses to Jesus' glory. We are also told that they were speaking. Therein we have a picture of all of Scripture, the law and the prophets, all of salvation

history up to that point, bearing witness to Jesus' glory and receiving the Father's words affirming him as the Chosen one and the Son of God.

What the transfiguration tells us about salvation

The moment of the transfiguration happened when Jesus was the furthest point on the map from Jerusalem he had been. And from this point on, Jesus moves toward the triumphal entry and the Cross. The transfiguration gives new light to who that man is. When Peter, John, and James watch Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, they know that it was the same person they saw transfigured who was sitting there. And when he's betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, it was that divine person who was betrayed. And when he was nailed to a Roman cross, it was that man who was tortured. And that means that they knew when these things were happening that that man, Jesus, wasn't merely the unfortunate victim of Roman oppression. He wasn't a misguided rogue religious teacher.

The person nailed to that cross was much, much more, someone bridging time and eternity, attested to by the living Moses and Elijah, and God the Father himself. Someone with a wholly other state of being and divine power behind him. The person who is about to begin his journey toward the Cross only goes there knowing exactly what he is doing and moves with intent. That means that he's going in order to accomplish something of real substance. A man, a being like the transfigured Jesus isn't trapped into anything, isn't the victim of anything unless he has a purpose in mind, and if a being like that moves with purpose, it is by definition great. So, a transfigured Jesus crucified means that the crucifixion accomplished something important. When THAT man dies for our sins, it accomplishes something real. If sins can be covered by a sacrificial death, that death, that sacrifice is the one that can do it and did do it.

What the transfiguration tells us about us

When the transfiguration moment ends, the disciples are left with this human Jesus, who'd they'd been walking with, sharing meals with, learning from, probably even joking with, and they'd been given a glimpse of the spiritual reality of who he is. And so have we. Now what do we do with that? What's the right response?

The thing that is the most helpful for us when looking at the transfiguration is the picture of Jesus in his glory, of who it is that is on our side and is walking with us. When we lift our eyes up to the mountains with the psalmist for where our help will come from, we have an answer in the transfiguration. When we find ourselves in a desperate moment we have access to help, to communion, to peace that passes understanding, because the transfigured Jesus is the one who offers it. Yes, Jesus is our friend, and this friend is the source of all being. He is inside and outside of time. And he died a shameful death for our ugliest sins so that we would never experience that shame before God. Because of Jesus' transfiguration, he shows his sacrifice to be greater, our debt to him is greater, and his friendship is more valuable because at the transfiguration, we see him more clearly, we see him for who he is. And the more clearly we see Jesus, the more valuable he will become to us. The Jesus of the transfiguration is available to us, is near to those who call on him, so be at peace in his presence, today and always.