

Transfiguration

The Transfiguration of our Lord is, in a manner of speaking, God's "no" to us when we try to whittle Jesus down to size. My brother loves to talk about Jesus as a "wise teacher" or as a "prophet," but, don't give him any of that "Son of God" stuff. I know, as I'm sure you do, plenty of folks who agree with my brother.

The relief we get from whittling Jesus down to size is that we can pick and choose what to follow and what to blow off. Or, perhaps more accurately, we can *admire* Jesus, without really following him at all.

Into that wishful thinking of ours comes the transfiguration. Six days after Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus takes three of them to the mountain. Just as God came into his rest following six days of creation, so Jesus, after six days, is shown to be, in all his glory, who he really is.

And yet, we modern folk have a hard time with brilliant lights and booming voices from the heavens. What *really* happened, we'd like to know.

What if Peter had remembered his video camera and filmed the whole thing? What would he have posted to You-Tube that night?

Yet people then were not significantly different from people today. Something astonishing happened. Something they didn't understand.

Peter began babbling about building little churches, and halfway through his rambling, is cut off by a voice saying to them, saying to us: "Listen to him!"

This event remains so vivid to Peter that years later, he recounts it in his second letter that we heard today. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this stunning event.

All of which brings us back to the main question: "Who is this Jesus?" That is the core question.

It is a core question because our answer determines how we live our lives, day in, day out.

Who is this Jesus?

Folks inside and outside the church ask that question all the time. One who asked that question is Flannery O'Connor.

Flannery O'Connor is probably the greatest storyteller this country has ever produced. She was a product of the Deep South and died at the too young age of 39, after producing dozens of remarkable short stories.

In one of those stories, she tells of a family (mom, dad, grandma, and two kids) who had the misfortune of being in a car accident in a remote area. As it happened, their car crashed just down the hill from where an escaped murderer was hiding out.

The murderer, nicknamed Misfit, started killing off one member of the family after another. The grandma appealed to Misfit to think of Jesus and to stop what he was doing. This is what Misfit had to say:

"Jesus was the only one that ever raised the dead."

"The Misfit continued, 'and he shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If he did what he said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow him, and if he didn't, then there's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can, by killing somebody or burning down his home or doing some other meanness to him.'" F. O'Connor, *A Good Man is Hard To Find*.

Jesus really does create a fork in the road, as even the Misfit knew. Either he is who the voice from the cloud insists he is, or he is a fraud, a charlatan, just another failure in a long line of failed messiahs.

Either way, it matters. It matters a lot.

Who is Jesus for us today? It's the same question Jesus asks his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?"

It is a question we often avoid looking at in the eye; preferring to leave the question hanging; because the answer, no matter the answer, has such profound consequences for how we live our lives.

Today, God insists on an answer to that question: "Who is Jesus?"

The blinding light, the voice thundering from the sky, it is all intent on getting our attention, here, now. It is a wake up call.

Annie Dillard, in her book, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, wonders about the complacency, the lack of attention, the sheer boredom too many folk bring to their faith and to their worship.

She asks:

"Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning."

"It is madness to wear ladies straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets! Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews!"

"For the sleeping God may awake someday and take offense; or the waking God may draw us to where we can never return."

Such is the Transfiguration of our Lord.

The transfiguration of our Lord tears the veil separating heaven and earth, and reveals what is too often hidden from view, the glory that God has prepared for each of us!

We should not be lulled into thinking that glory doesn't exist at all.

Instead, perhaps we can remember that while sometimes God meets us on the mountaintop of profound experiences, God most often meets us in the ordinary bend of our daily lives, with a gentle touch, a kind word, a nod of understanding.

After the light, after the booming voice and command that we "listen to him!" perhaps then, alone with Jesus, we can begin to see that whether in joy or sorrow, God is.

That God seeks us out not in monuments, but through one another. That God is risky and dangerous, especially to our settled ways.

That God will pay any price to have us.

That we cannot escape God -- for God will find us in our homes, and in our work, "when our hearts are broken and when we discover joy. God will find us when we run away from God and when we are sitting in the midst of what seems like hell." M. Anshute, 1A Feasting on the Word, 456.

Now the light is gone, and the voice no longer lingers. There they are, alone with Jesus.

He bends over, touching each on their shoulder:

"Get up, don't be afraid"; he says to them, to you, to me.

As we each of us rise, at the gentle urging of Jesus, perhaps it is then that we can say once again,

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!"

"Help me to follow you!"

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