

When Everything Changes

Mark 9:2-9 (February 14, 2021)

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²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Historical Context

Peter, contrary to popular portrayal, makes the connection that is too obscure for us to make. According to some Jewish expectation and as stated in the book of Zechariah the prophet (see 14:16-21), God would usher in the new age, the “Day of the Lord,” during the Feast of Booths. This God-commanded festival kept by Jews for centuries, was considered a possible time for God’s taking control of God’s creation and beginning the age of shalom. So, Peter’s question about building booths is neither laughable nor mistaken.

Theme: When Everything Changes

As miraculous and light-filled as it is, the Transfiguration also conveys bewilderment and loss. Why? Because embedded in the story is a threshold. A change. A boundary line marking a “before” and an “after.” We humans rarely cross thresholds without hesitation. Sometimes we cross over in grief, pining for what we’re leaving behind. Sometimes we move forward in fear. Sometimes we refuse to cross over until we are forced to put one foot in front of the other.

The Transfiguration is important because it reveals Christ's divine nature. But, the story pivots around Peter, James, and John. These friends of Jesus have spent years following him, listening to his teachings, and witnessing his miracles. By the time Jesus invites them to the mountaintop, they have good reason to believe they know him.

But then, on the mountain, the unimaginable happens. Before their very eyes, Jesus changes, becoming at once both fully himself and fully strange. And suddenly, Jesus’s stunned disciples find themselves standing on a threshold. The man they thought they knew is suddenly more. And the path that lies ahead of him upends everything the disciples think they understand about Jesus.

In other words, one phase of their life and their comprehension is ending. What will it look like to begin another? On Transfiguration Sunday, we come to the end of another liturgical season. Having seen the lights of Epiphany, we prepare now for the long shadows of Lent. We don't know what thresholds we'll encounter in the wilderness. We don't know how God might invite us to change, to grow, to cross over. But, the life of faith tells us we can trust in the God who invites us to cross over. Resurrection is ours on the other side.