

The Rev'd Misty Kiwak Jacobs
Grace Episcopal Church
Transfiguration Year A 2026
Luke 9:28-36

“... we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16)

The Transfiguration has always struck me as a resplendent mystical experience meant to instruct the disciples. Jesus takes Peter, James and John on a journey up the mountain to pray. After the journey and we can presume a period of deep prayer, they have fallen asleep after the rigorous hike up the mountain.

They awake to blazing light, to the sight of the prophets standing beside Jesus. And then God's voice thunders from the heavens. They have prayed and the fruit of their prayer is this exquisite experience of God and the prophets.

This week, a priest colleague shared a beautiful perspective on the Transfiguration that hadn't occurred to me. It's a perspective that reminds us of the humanity of Jesus, that was fully God AND fully human.

What if the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mountain is to affirm Jesus in his ministry? Verse 31 reads, “They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem.” What if Moses and Elijah were there to buoy Jesus for the days ahead?

What if God's voice was not to reassure the disciples or “proof test” Jesus' divinity, but to strengthen Jesus for what lay ahead?

Let's focus on the beauty of the vision for a moment.

Matthew 17:2 “And Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes turned white like light.”

Mark 9:3 “His clothes shone and became white like snow in such a manner that men on earth cannot make white....”

Luke 9:29 “and while he prayed, the appearance of his face was changed, and his clothes became white and dazzling.”

God communicates with light. At creation, “The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep water. The Spirit of God was hovering over the water.

³ Then God said, “Let there be **light!**” (Gen 1:2-3).

We know God led the Israelites through the desert at night “in a column of fire to give them **light** so that they could travel by day or by night.” (Exodus 13:21).

In the Christmas story, shepherds in a dark field are blinded when “An angel from the Lord suddenly appeared to them. The glory of the Lord filled the area with **light**, and they were terrified” (Luke 2:9)

On the mountain, Jesus’ face like the sun, clothing like white light, shining white like snow, whiter than humanly possible to make white, an unearthly vision, celestial, sensory experience of the divine.

It is relevant that 8 days before this mountaintop experience, Jesus had explained to the disciples the suffering he was about to endure. He says in Verse 22, “The son of man must suffer a great many things, and he will be rejected by the elders and the high priests and the scribes, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise” (Luke 9:22).

I’ve always taken this, maybe you have too, as God incarnate coolly stating the facts—little future-telling to psychologically prepare the disciples. But Jesus was fully God AND fully

human. Maybe the knowledge he was to suffer these things and be rejected by the religious leaders, and then killed, maybe that was an emotional burden.

I had the thought, what if I think I'm doing the will of God but Bishop Brown hates me and reviles me, and Pope Leo (not that we're Catholic but he's a holy man) what if Pope Leo speaks out publicly against me? I would be devastated. Imagine how Jesus felt.

As Christians 2,000 years later, this is a rote story to us, but these were things that Jesus, a human being, anticipated and endured. We usually presume he was quite philosophical about it. What if he wasn't? What if he was scared?

What if the glory, the blazing intensity of heavenly light, is to assure Jesus of the divine origin of his mission? What if Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, the great Hebrew prophet, were present to cue Jesus he was one among them? The ole "Chin up, buckaroo."

Jesus would know that Elijah's presence is the fulfillment of prophecy in Malachi where God tells us, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Malachi 4:5-6).

"They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem" (v. 31). The prophets were speaking to Jesus about the suffering, death and resurrection.

The prophets not only affirm Jesus through their titles, but also through solidarity in suffering. Elijah had experienced persecution by leaders when Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him (1 Kings 19:2). Moses experienced persecution, abandoned in a basket as an infant, and when the Pharaoh commanded the midwives to kill all Hebrew baby boys.

Leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses faced their continued grumbling and near insurrection. Moses was their liberator, but they did not trust him, complaining whenever they faced any difficulty, "If only we had died in Egypt!"

Moses and Elijah know what it is to suffer for doing the will of God. Who better to console and reassure Jesus for what is to come?

Back on the mountain, the prophets disappear and the voice of God descends, the voice which says, “*This is my Son, my Beloved; listen to him!*”, “” (v. 35). What if we read this as a father reassuring his son with the affirmation and encouragement of a good parent.

Some of you might be wondering, “So what? What can we take from this?” Perhaps it can empower us in our humanity, to better follow Jesus into the difficult places of our lives, Jesus who knew difficulty and anxiety.

And of course the disciples want to capture this light-saturated, miraculous experience. Peter says to Jesus, “Let us set up 3 dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (v 33). It is good for us to be here. Let’s live in this miracle forever. The scripture assesses Simon’s desire: “He didn’t know what he was saying.”

Peter didn’t know that he was asking for salvation to be interrupted, for the will of God for the arc of the universe to be reduced to one mystical experience. It’s a natural desire. Have you had moments you wished you could have captured?

I think of when my children were little, just out of the bath in fresh pajamas, how tiny and snugly they were and how good they smelled. If only I could have frozen those moments in time. Good for me, not good for the children who needed to grow into adulthood and live their own lives.

The disciples witnessed a breathtaking, divine community on the mountaintop, Moses, and Jesus in glorious burning light and they wish to capture it. That’s a human desire. But the story isn’t finished. Jesus will make an offering of himself on Good Friday, and on the third day he will rise, unbinding us from the powers of evil and destruction, robbing death of the last word.

We did not share that mountain top experience with the prophets, although I suspect the contemplatives and mystics among you in the pews might have had a glimpse. But all of us, each time we gather to worship, gather with Prophets, Scribes, Poets, Sages, Apostles and early Church Mothers and Fathers through the scriptures we read here and the liturgy we experience.

On Sunday mornings we center ourselves for one, short hour in eternal beauty. We reunite ourselves in life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Whatever discouragement and suffering we carry to the altar, whatever difficult journey that lay ahead of us, whatever fears, we claim Resurrection hope.