

**Last Sunday after Epiphany**  
**The Feast of The Transfiguration**  
**Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish**  
**Saint Francisville, LA**  
**7 February 2016**

**Luke 9:28-36**

We know this episode we have read in the Gospel of Luke very well. We preach on it every year at the end of the season “After Epiphany”. Both Mark and Matthew have this episode as occurring “six days” after Peter’s proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah. Luke today tells us that the event took place “About eight days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God”. As it is customary for Luke, Jesus is praying at the mountain, as he does before every major event in his life (5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 11:1). While he is praying his clothes and his face were transfigured. His appearance changed as he is surrounded by light and “Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.” Only Luke mentions the expression “Two men,” which makes me remember the episode at the resurrection of Jesus when two men are seen in the empty tomb and they give testimony to the resurrected Christ. Perhaps Luke wants to make a connection between the Transfiguration and the Resurrection: They both reveal Christ’s Glory, with the Transfiguration being a foretaste of the fullest revelation of Jesus’ Glory that will come later at the Resurrection.

Luke tells us that the two men, Moses and Elijah, “appeared in glory”. They too were covered by the radiance that covered Jesus. They shared in the Messiah’s glory. Luke also gives us the ability to listen to their conversation. They “were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” I have said elsewhere that Moses represents the Law in the Scriptures of Israel, where Elijah represents the prophetic tradition, which started in antiquity and continued to develop until John the Baptist. The message here is that the entire Jewish Scripture points to Christ and finds its center in Christ. We know this in Luke because of the several times Jesus uses the expression “Moses and the Prophets” in his ministry. When the rich man asks what he must do to gain eternal life, Jesus responds, “Listen to Moses and the Prophets” (16:29); after the resurrection, when Jesus teaches the disciples at Emmaus, he started “with Moses and all the prophets” (24:27) to teach them that the entire Jewish Scripture points to him. When Jesus is with the Disciples in Jerusalem after the Resurrection he teaches them saying, “everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled” (24:44). Jesus sees his story as a continuation and a fulfillment of what is written about him in the Jewish Scripture. He is the one announced by the Prophets, he is the one “like Moses” promised to Israel. He is the Son of David, the Suffering Servant, the Lion of Judah, the Son of Man, the Messiah.

Luke tells us that the disciples were weighed down with sleep, which again makes a direct connection with the scene at the garden of Gethsemany, right before the Passion narrative. Nonetheless, "They saw his glory and the two men who stood with him." Perhaps the light was so bright that it woke them up and as they opened their eyes they saw this amazing vision. Peter is overcome with emotion at what he sees and he exclaims, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." It is easy to criticize Peter. He is not thinking straight and fails to see the ways of God. But, my friends, I believe that we all would prefer the radiant, transfigured Jesus to the Suffering Servant, covered in blood, spat upon, broken, abandoned and betrayed. We all prefer to be surrounded by God's glory hear the voice of God clearly tell us "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" than to be surrounded by God's silence, where he appears to have abandoned us, where we can't see or hear his voice. I rather hear God's voice about his Son than to witness the agonizing silence of the cross, as Christ is utterly alone in his suffering on Good Friday. I rather see Jesus in his radiance with Moses and Elijah on both sides than to see him dying on a cross with two criminals on both sides. I rather build three glorious houses at the mountain of Transfiguration, where i can dwell with Jesus and share in his glory for ever, than to acknowledge him and face a fate like his at his trial.

I often criticize Peter, but it is my own tendency to want a victorious Messiah without the necessity of the cross that I am criticizing. I am too much like Peter. I want Jesus to remain up on that mountain. There is death down at the valley. There is pain and suffering. There is betrayal. There is hatred and sin. If Jesus remains at this mountain he will be safe. He will be happy. He will be respected and adored, as he is surrounded by his glory. Luke tells us that Peter did not know what he said. He did not know that this Jesus has a mission to fulfill. While Peter is still speaking the Voice of God is heard. "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" In Luke, Jesus is the "Chosen One". This reminds me of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. The perfect Lamb had to be chosen. One without blemishes. It is as if Luke is tellings us that Jesus is fulfilling Genesis 24. He is the Chosen Lamb God gives us for the sacrifice. He is the perfect offering that eliminates the necessity of all other sacrifices. He is the one chosen, God's own Son, the perfect and sufficient sacrifice.

My friends we can preach many sermons on God's instructions to "Listen to Him" which in the original language actually means "Keep on Listening to Him." But I want to stay with the image of what it means to follow Jesus down from this mountain. I have said before that Christianity is a religion that demands full engagement with the world. Ours is a faith that refuses to fall for escapism. Even though things are easier in the mountain-top experiences of our life, we have no choice but to return to the valley of our every day life. Jesus himself made it very clear that if anyone wants to be his disciple, they must take up their cross and follow him. The cross we carry is our own unique cross.

We are not called to carry anyone else's cross, even though Paul asks us to ease each other's burdens. It is our cross we carry, our anxieties we deal with, our doubts we grapple with, our sufferings we endure, our relationships we build and grow, our fears we conquer or fight against, and our own mortality we face daily. Each one of us has a tailor-made cross and we must carry this cross to the end.

But, my friends, the good news today is that Jesus, the Son of God, walks with us as we carry our cross. He knows the tribulations, desires, and longings of our hearts. He has experienced the betrayal, loneliness, and despair of broken relationships and betrayal. He knows what physical pain, humiliation, and fear feel like. He is utterly relatable and empathic with our human condition because he has humanity under his skin. Because he chose to come down from that mountain and walk to Jerusalem, we access to hope of restoration and forgiveness. Because he came down from that mountain we know that he meets us in the "gutter-days" of our lives. As we carry our cross he leads the way, surrounding us with his love, his mercy and his compassion.

We will begin a journey towards Jerusalem this week, which in our Church we call the season of Lent. This journey will be a journey into our own humanity. As we prepare to die with Christ on Good Friday, we must look deep within ourselves and assess the quality of our lives. Lent confronts us with our sinful condition and the frailty of our humanity. It reminds us of our need for repentance and atonement, and of our God's grace and mercy for those who come to him with penitent hearts. Lent reminds us of the great sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our sins, as the chosen Lamb of God.

I pray that you will join Christ on his march to Jerusalem this season of Lent. And as you do, I hope that you will ask the Holy Spirit into your life to initiate any amendment of life necessary to make you more fully into the full stature of Christ. May he continue to bless you, Amen!