

The Rev. Nina Bacas
 Year C Transfiguration Sunday February 27, 2022
 Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria Virginia
 Gospel of Luke 9:28-36

Transfiguration is not a word we use in common everyday language. But spelled with a lower case t, “to transfigure” is a verb like any other. Still you would never use it in a sentence like, “my daughter transfigured into an effervescent princess for Halloween.” That would get you some strange looks. Maybe transformed, or simply dressed up would have been better. But in this particular example, transfigure with a lower case t would be just the right word because it means: to change into something more beautiful or elevated.

On this day in Luke’s Gospel, the foursome of Jesus, Peter, James and John are climbing to a mountaintop. At this point in time, Jesus had started his conversations about what would ultimately happen to him. It had been difficult and tense. Afterwards, it must have been a nice break to hike together in this beautiful setting. When they reached the peak and Peter, James and John were sleepily gazing across at the lovely view, the impossible happened. In this singular moment, Jesus somehow suddenly changed into something more beautiful and elevated than how he was before. The Message Bible translation says that sunlight poured from Jesus’s face and his clothes were filled with light. But if that wasn’t enough, two ancestors of the Hebrew faith appeared alongside the illuminated Jesus: Moses and Elijah. It was the Transfiguration with a capital T and there is only one. Jesus had said that he comes to fulfill the law and the prophets of the Old Testament. Now Moses, of the law, and the prophet Elijah were handing these over to Jesus, and the three disciples witnessed it.

Then as quickly as the Transfiguration began, it ended. While we missed the conversation details of Jesus, Moses and Elijah, the words of God’s own voice were clear.

God said – look, right here.

This is my son.

My chosen.

Listen to him.

These are the words that Peter, James, and John heard. These are the words for us as well.

When we listen to God in beautiful places, be it mountaintops or shorelines or Cathedrals, it is human nature to want to stay there and savor the feeling. Peter was certainly ready to pitch some tents! Last week, I returned from vacation in San Diego and Santa Barbara, and most definitely felt God’s presence in some stunning landscapes. I have to admit that part of me didn’t want to leave, especially when it was 70 degrees! But when we listen to God in these places and also place our focus on his Son, we remember that every mountaintop comes with a valley. In our Gospel, God said to listen to Jesus, so that’s exactly what Peter, James and John did. They followed him back down the mountain, meeting people in the valleys and in the byways, healing and teaching wherever they were called. God may speak to us in beautiful places, but Jesus reminds us not to stay there.

After the Transfiguration, the disciples walked away from the mountaintop differently. We walk differently too. As you walk through this Wednesday with dust on your forehead, remember that God is always calling you to be his child who is more beautiful and elevated than mere dust. We may not pretend to be effervescent princes and princesses even one night a year, but we are called to live into what is real. As baptized Christians we are all members of the royal priesthood of Christ every day of our lives. In this royal priesthood, our offering to God is ourselves as witnesses to Christ in a world desperate for him. Like the disciples, we walk differently because of who we are and what we witness.

As you walk differently, you may end up in places that the world does not consider beautiful or elevated. God is calling you to be love, grace and mercy where you may not see much of it. Valleys and byways that are desperate for you as Christ's hands and feet in the world. I know that's a lot to digest on a Sunday morning, but I leave you with this. When the moment of Transfiguration ended, the Gospel of Matthew reports that Jesus touched the disciples said, "Get up and don't be afraid." If you hear that too, I have a hunch that in those valleys and byways, you may find a mountaintop.