

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 02/27/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

The Transfiguration of the Lord

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, February 27th

Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

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Listen to Jesus!

A few verses earlier in the text we read how Jesus was at prayer and He asked His disciples, "*Who do you say that I am?*" (9:18-21). Peter answered correctly, "*The Christ of God.*" If there is any remaining confusion to the reader of Luke, the transfiguration of Jesus narrative will clear it up. Not only does the text further reveal Christ's identity, but it also reveals who we are transformed to be in Christ and what we are called to do.

Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a) Commentary

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.

As the text indicates, the following events occur about eight days after Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah of God. Notice again the importance and relevance of prayer at major stages in Jesus' life. Luke more than the other synoptic Gospel writers emphasizes prayer. Already in Luke we have read how the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus after His baptism while He was in prayer (3:21,22), how Jesus spent the night in prayer before choosing His twelve apostles (6:12-16) and the event leading up to the lectionary passage when Jesus was at prayer and asked His disciples the question about His identity (9:18-20). For this event, notice how Jesus takes only Peter, James, and John with Him. Even though He had chosen twelve apostles, He has selected three for additional attention.

²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Notice again the connection between prayer and divine revelation. The dazzling white clothing is the color of heavenly garments (Acts 1:10; Revelation 4:4; 7:9). Both Moses and Elijah were expected to return before the final judgment (Deuteronomy 18:15; Malachi 4:5). Both also had visions of God on a mountain (Exodus 24:15-18; 1 Kings 19:8-13). Moses typically represents the Law and Elijah represents the Prophets. Jesus is thus the fulfillment of both. The presence of both Moses and Elijah confirms the crowds were in error when they thought Jesus was either Moses or Elijah. The Greek word rendered as "*departure*" is *exodos* and presumably refers to Jesus' upcoming death, resurrection and ascension that will occur in Jerusalem.

³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter

said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.

While Jesus was in prayer on the mountain, His inner circle of disciples was falling asleep. We encounter this again immediately before Jesus is arrested (22:45). To spend long periods in prayer requires both physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual discipline. The text refers to Moses and Elijah as men and not apparitions. The making of three tents alludes to the Feast of Booths. This is where the Israelites would live in temporary shelters for seven days as a reminder that God provided for their ancestors while they were in the wilderness - a direct connection with the Exodus. Who can blame Peter for wanting to hang out on the top of the mountain for a while with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah?!

³⁴As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One;^[b] listen to him!" ³⁶And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

The cloud signifies God's presence (Exodus 16:10; 19:9; 24:15-18) and thus the voice belongs to God the Father. In a scene that is reminiscent of the one following the baptism of Jesus (3:21,22), note the difference in whom God is speaking to. In the post-baptism scene, God is speaking to Jesus: "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*" In the mountain top scene, God is speaking to Jesus' disciples: "*This is my Son...*" There is also a command given to Jesus' disciples from none other than God, "*...listen to him!*" This scene has gone beyond theological revelation. It commands action on the part of the disciples. In the post-baptism scene, the voice came from Heaven. In the mountain top scene, the voice is in the cloud and thus God is in the cloud that surrounds them. This is a most intense moment of revelation.

³⁷On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. ⁴⁰And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." ⁴¹Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." ⁴²While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

Beginning with "*on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain*" ties this next event with Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain top. Going back to earlier in Luke's narrative, Jesus "*...called the twelve apostles together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.*" (9:1,2). Here we have a situation where the disciples were unable to cast out a particular demon. It is unclear from the text if Peter, James, and John were involved in this failure or whether they were just arriving on the scene with Jesus. Regardless, Jesus diagnoses the problem as His disciples' lack of faith and rebukes them for such. Jesus then takes the matter into His own hands and the result is seen as the majesty of God.

Reflections

One aspect of this narrative that is overshadowed by the events on the top of the mountain is the opening verse which states how Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went up on the mountain to pray. Previously, Jesus went

up on a mountain and prayed to God all night long then at daybreak He called His disciples together and selected the twelve (6:12-13). Later, Jesus would pray on the Mount of Olives during His last night on earth (22:39-46). Prayer played a prominent role in Jesus' ministry. As did His rhythm of withdrawing to remote areas to pray to the Father after which He would emerge spiritually renewed to reengage in His ministry with clarity and focus.

The transfiguration narrative has profound theological implications and addresses the question, beyond any doubt, as to the identity of Jesus. The transfiguration narrative also reveals much about who we are in Christ. As disciples of Jesus, we too are perhaps like Peter. We would rather remain on the mountain top! But the transfiguration narrative, particularly when connected to the events that immediately follow, shows us that our place is down in the world. We are to leave our lofty worship centers and go out into the world as a community of disciples. It is only in the world we can be the hands and feet of the transfigured Jesus, healing the children possessed by the evil of this world. It is only in the world that others will encounter the transfigured Jesus through our words and deeds. It is only by us being in the world working and proclaiming in the name of the transfigured Jesus so that others will experience the majesty of God. It is only by being in the world that we will obey God's command: *"This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"*

