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Luke 9:28-36

A GLIMPSE OF EASTER

Easter comes late this year—it's not until the middle of April. And that can feel a long way off. But no worries. Today's scripture passage offers us a preview of what Easter will bring—a bit like the coming attractions at the movies.

Today's passage from Luke is the account of what is called the Transfiguration. In this story, Jesus goes up a mountain—right there we have a clue that something holy is about to take place because in the Bible, mountains are places where one is likely to encounter God. Jesus takes with him a few disciples as witnesses. While praying, Jesus has a dramatic transformation into a kind of human glow worm--his face is changed and his clothing becomes dazzling white. And suddenly there appears with Jesus two of the Jewish peoples greatest religious and historic heroes: Moses and Elijah. It was an awesome sight. And then a cloud overshadows all of them and God's voice is heard declaring, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

This is an incredible story. It is also a story that is hard for most of us to relate to. Very few among us are likely to have had an experience anywhere remotely like this one. And because it seems so un-relatable, so fairytale-like, we may wonder what in the world we are to make of this story.

But what if we regard the Transfiguration as a preview for Easter. This makes more sense when we consider what takes place immediately before the Transfiguration. Just before Jesus and the three disciples go up that mountain and have that awesome experience, immediately prior to that, Jesus is telling his followers some pretty difficult news. Listen to what

Jesus says to them: “The Son of Humanity must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Jesus is predicting his own passion experience, his own crucifixion and death.

But he’s not done. Next Jesus tells his disciples: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” Not only is Jesus talking about his own suffering and death, but now he calls his followers to also go the way of the cross, to also expect suffering.

Now let’s be clear about something. Jesus is not calling his followers to carry our own crosses because death and suffering are such good things. What Jesus is calling us to do is to walk the way of God—which is the way of love. And the way of love costs us something. It costs us to love other people—because, as we all know, people are not easy to love. It costs us to forgive. It costs us to stand up for the oppressed. It costs us not to retaliate against enemies. It costs us to be patient, to put aside our own wishes to help another, to make personal sacrifices to care for others. Love costs us something. And as we know, love cost Jesus something.

But love is also the key to knowing abundant life. Jesus explains to his followers, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” If we want to save our lives, we will lose it doing the work of love. Love is the key to making peace. Love is key for pursuing justice. Love is what will heal broken relationships. Love for ourselves is essential for us to heal what is broken within us. And all of this, all of this will necessitate walking the way of struggle, sacrifice, and heavy lifting. In other words, it entails walking the way of the cross. Love costs us something.

All this talk about death and suffering and crosses is what precedes the story of the Transfiguration. We can only imagine how overwhelming and how heavy such words must have

been to Jesus' disciples. Maybe you feel that kind of heaviness each day when listening to the daily news or when reading the paper. There is so much suffering and brokenness—stories of invasions and wars and abuse and cruelty and greed and corruption. It is overwhelmingly sad and ugly. Maybe the disciples felt their spirits dashed, their hopes crushed, and their hearts grow heavy with the ugly news Jesus was telling them.

But then, just when the air is thick with all this talk of passion and suffering, Jesus takes them up the mountain. And Jesus is transformed into something spectacularly beautiful. Jesus radiates God's glory. Jesus radiates God's love. Jesus radiates God's beauty. Jesus radiates from God's power to transform. With the terrifying words of death and suffering still ringing in their ears, the disciples are given a glimpse of beauty, a glimpse of holiness, a glimpse of love. There they are given a glimpse of Easter. Easter will be, after all, God's triumph over death. Easter will be the triumph of hope over despair and beauty over ugliness. Easter is God's transfiguration of death into life. There on that mountain, the disciples are given a preview of Easter. And it comes as a gift. When something as ugly as death lay on their horizon, God offers them, God offers us, something beautiful.

Maybe that can be our take-away of the Transfiguration: it reveals the beauty and mystery of God's presence and God's love in the face of all that is ugly. And there is indeed so much ugliness in this world. We need a dose of beauty, genuine beauty. Up on the mountain of transfiguration, Jesus radiates with a beauty that is rooted in God's love.

And this love transfigures us as well. This love makes something beautiful out of you and me and the ugly parts of our lives and the ugly parts of our world. I've seen that beauty in those of you who work at the food pantry and in others of you who welcome the stranger and the migrant. I've seen that beauty in those who send cards and in others who offer rides. That

beauty shines from you and transfigures you when you are kind to another person and when you do the hard work of trying to forgive. That beauty is found within you as you face your own brokenness and seek God's healing. That beauty is found within the person next to you, if we are but willing to look with new eyes and new hearts at them.

This beauty, a beauty rooted in God's love, is what will transfigure our lives and our world. Indeed, it is the *only* thing that will transfigure us and our world.

And when we live this way, pursuing this beauty in all we say and do, our lives will become a glimpse of Easter.