

Sunday, February 27, 2022 - More Than Just the Transfiguration of Jesus!

One of the best things about a good story is the way a good story lends itself to all sorts of interpretations. The story itself is quite thin. By that I mean that there are not very many details at all. This story is also quite thin in another way. You see this story reveals a thin place. A thin place is a place where the veil between the everyday mundane things of life and the sacred HOLINESS that is the SOURCE of all life is stretched so thin that we can see the ONE who IS BEYOND, the BEYOND and BEYOND that also. It is the thinness of this little story that allows it to reveal so very much about the nature of our reality. The disciples Peter, James, and John are taken up a high mountain by Jesus. In the Hebrew scriptures high mountains are the place to go if you want to experience the ONE who is the MYSTERY which we call "God". There are all sorts of interpretations about what transpired on that mountaintop. This is after all Transfiguration Sunday and so many of the interpretations of this story focus on the transfiguration of Jesus. I'd like to suggest another interpretation of this story. When we look closely, it is possible to see that Jesus is not the only one who is transfigured in this story.

I'm pretty sure that Peter, James and John, are also transfigured. If we let ourselves wander into this story, perhaps we too can be transfigured. Most of us are a lot like Peter, James, and John. I mean there's nothing remarkable about these particular followers of Jesus. They are pretty typical. They are searching for someone to save them. Like most of us, what they really need to be saved from is their fear. Fear is something that each one of us contends with on a daily basis. We are obsessed with our fears. So much so, that it should come as no surprise to us that the phrase

"Do not be afraid," appears 366 times in the Bible. As they say in Ireland, "366 times that's once for every day and once for no reason at all." Do not be afraid, in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament, we hear first the voice of God, and then Jesus, say over and over again, "Do not be afraid." In this little story, Peter, James, and John are overcome with fear, so much so that they fall to the ground. Jesus comes to them, touches them and says, "Get up! Do not be afraid!"

There's a story from India that sheds light upon the darkness of fear. People have told this story for several thousand years. It is about a man who was condemned to spend a night in a cell with a poisonous snake. The man was warned that if he made the slightest movement, the snake would be on top of him and he would die. So, the man stood in the corner of the cell, directly opposite to where the snake was, and he was petrified. He

barely dared to breathe for fear of alerting the snake to his presence. The man stood stiff in the corner. He was actually petrified all night long. The next morning, as the first rays of light began to come into the cell, the man was scarcely able to make out the shape of the snake, and he said to himself, "I am so lucky that I never stirred. But as the sun rose higher, when the full force of the light came into the cell, the man could finally see that the focus of his fear wasn't a snake at all. It was nothing more than an old rope.

In so many of the rooms in our minds, there are harmless old ropes thrown in corners. When our fear begins to work on us, we convert those old ropes into monsters, who hold us prisoner in the bleakest, most impoverished rooms of our minds. Outside of these rooms there are glories waiting for us, but we remain transfixed and sometimes even paralyzed by our fears.

It is no coincidence that so many of our images of the DIVINE MYSTERY include light. For who among us doesn't long for a DIVINE superhero who can shed light upon all our fear and chase away all the deadly snakes and the old ropes that threaten to keep us paralyzed. I suspect that this little transfiguration story reveals more than just the transfiguration of Jesus. I suspect that in Jesus his followers saw an image of the DIVINE which transfigured their images of the nature of God, and in that light, they too were transfigured. Peter, James, and John fell to the ground overcome with fear. "Jesus came toward them and touched them saying, "Get up! Do not be afraid." When they looked up, they did not see anyone but Jesus. Jesus, the one in whom they had seen the image of the DIVINE. In Jesus they saw the REALITY of the MYSTERY revealed. Despite their fear they were able to get up and follow Jesus down the mountainside, into the valley which harbored all the same old ropes which they had always feared.

Yet somehow, Peter, James, and John, were transfigured; no longer cowering on the ground; no longer paralyzed by fear. Inspired, by the LIGHT they were encouraged – quite literally, filled with the courage to follow Jesus all the way to Jerusalem; right into the snake-pit of all their fears. "Do not be afraid." over and over again. "366 times, once for every day and once for no reason at all, "Do not be afraid."

Jesus is no superhero, no magic saviour who can turn snakes into ropes. But in Jesus we catch a glimpse of the LIGHT, a LIGHT which reveals the ONE in whom, we live and move and have our BEING. In the LIGHT, we too are transfigured, set free from the paralysis of fear, so that

we can move beyond the various corners in which we cower. There are no deadly snakes waiting to pounce, just old ropes, the same old ropes that have kept us in our respective corners.

It is long past time for us to let the LIGHT transfigure us. Do not be afraid. For it is fear itself which destroys life. May the LIGHT of CHRIST shine forth in, with, through, and beyond you, so that each of us might be transfigured into the fullness of all that we are created to be. Get up. Do not be afraid. Follow Jesus, BEYOND the BEYOND, and BEYOND that also into the ONE who is the LOVE we call God.