

Feast of the Transfiguration

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Peter 1:13-21

Luke 9:28-36

We were exhausted.

Our feet were blistered.
Our legs were weary.
Our backs were screaming.

We were worn slap out,
and so was he.

For days and days
we had been traveling,
teaching, curing, feeding . . .
always, always
surrounded by people,
droves of people.

It was wonderful,
but it was also exhausting.

Do you know,
just a few days before,
I had watched him feed
five thousand people?

We had said, "Lord,
this is a lost cause!
There's no way
we can tend to all
these tired,
these poor,
these huddled masses.
Send them home."

"No, no," he said.
"Sit them down, and
bring me what food we have.
It'll be enough."

And we did.
And it was.

It was miraculous,
and wonderful,
and downright stupefying.

How could anyone not know—
how could anyone not see—
that this man was
special,
holy,
different?

* * *

But as different
as he may have been,
he was not immune to fatigue.
Like the rest of us,
I could tell
he was beginning
to wear thin.

So it was no surprise
when he looked at me,
and James, and John,
and said, “Come on, guys.
Let’s go pray.”

What *did* surprise me
was that when he pointed
to the top of a nearby mountain.
“Up there,” he said.

“Up there?” I squawked.
“Lord, do you not see
how tired we are already?”

But in his firm, gentle way,
he said nothing.
He simply walked,
and we followed behind
in silence.

* * *

I complain about
going up the mountain,
but the truth is
mountains are special.

It was on a mountain
that Moses spoke to God
and received the Law
all those hundreds and hundreds
of years before.

It was on a mountain
that the prophet Elijah
heard the voice of God
not in the wind,
not in the earthquake,
not in the fire . . .
but in the peace and quiet
of God's still, small voice.

So, tired though I was,
I was also a little excited
to be going up a mountain
with him.

Perhaps we were going
to find God.

Perhaps,
like Moses and Elijah before us,
we were finally going
to see God
face to face.

* * *

And so we walked.
We walked,
and we hiked,
and we climbed
for what felt like ages.

Our hot, hardened backs grew hotter
in the evening sun.

Our weary hands grew wearier
with every rock and tree we grasped.

Our dirty feet grew dirtier:
calloused, dusty, and dry,
save for the bits of moisture
on the blisters
where our sandals kept
slipping from our feet.

By the time we made it to the top,
it was already nightfall,
and we were spent.

* * *

But just as the rays of the sun
tucked themselves away
behind the horizon . . .

just as the lavender sky
gave way to a deep, dark, purple plum . . .

just as the stars
began to sing their silent chorus . . .

something strange
began to happen.

There he was:
our rabbi,
our teacher,
our friend,
just as dirty,
just as weary,
just as tired
and humble
and human
as all the rest of us.

We knew him,
and we loved him,
the crumpled,
weary,
praying
heap
that he was.

But all of a sudden,
as our eyes grew heavy
with the weight of the day,
he began . . .
to change.

Oh how I've tried and tried
to describe it before,
but I'll never do it justice
because no language on earth
can capture the full glory of heaven.

It was like his body became
possessed with light . . .
not the light of a fire,
not even the light of the sun,
but with Light!
Light from Light!
True Light,
eternal Light . . .
the Light that was always there
in all the heavenly realms
before God ever spoke into our world,
"Let there be light."

It was like the chorus
of a thousand alleluias
took hold of him
and poured forth from his body,
a cacophonous corona
emanating from his frame.

We say it was white,
bright white,
dazzling white,
but it was more.

It was like the rainbows
of a million tiny crystals,
shining off his face,
dancing off his hands,
his feet,
his clothes.

It was warm.
It was beautiful.
It was real.

It was heaven on earth,
all right there . . .
flowing in
and through
his beautiful face,
his magnificent body.

The truth is
it probably only lasted
a few moments,
maybe even just a few seconds,
but to us it felt
like all eternity.

And there,
standing beside him
were those same two who,
all those centuries before,
had climbed the mountain
in search of God:
Moses and Elijah.

Like the rest of us,
they, too, looked awe-struck.
They, too, looked like
they had finally found
the thing they had so desperately sought
a hundred lifetimes ago.

He who had received the Law from God.
He who had heard the voice of God.
They who had been living
in light perpetual
all these years

now looked as though
they were seeing the face of God
for the very first time.

They looked upon the face of our friend,
and they *worshiped*.

People have given me such a hard time
for suggesting that we build
three temples,
three booths,
three tabernacles
so we could stay there forever.

“Huh huh huh,
dumb old Peter,” they say.

But you know what?
You would have done the same thing.
All the glory of heaven
was right there
streaming from that mountain,
streaming from that moment,
streaming from that man.

I could have stayed there
and worshiped forever.

* * *

But you know the rest.
A great cloud—
the thick, murky, mysterious
glory of God—
covered over us,
and in a voice
that rattled my bones,
I heard God say,
“This is my Son, my Chosen;
listen to him!”

And like that,
it ended.

There he was,
our rabbi,
our teacher,
our friend,
just as dirty,
just as humble
just as human
as he'd always been . . .
except not.

Somehow, he was changed.
Somehow, we were changed.
Somehow, all the world
and all the matter in it
would never be the same again.

* * *

Looking back,
I thought
we were going up that mountain
to see God face to face.

I thought maybe,
like Moses in the desert,
we'd find him
in some burning bush,
ablaze with the glory of God.

But it turns out,
we saw something more.

Jesus *became* the burning bush:
burning but not consumed;
blazing with the light of the great I Am;
the faceless Father shining
through the face of our Lord and friend.

The truth is
we didn't need to build
a temple,
a booth,
a tabernacle.

He *was* the temple.
He *was* the booth.
He *is* the tabernacle:
the home of God
right here on earth.

* * *

So . . .
are you weary?
are you spent?

Are you exhausted
with the cares of the world,
with the work of the day,
with the demands of the people?

Well then, you've come to the right place.
This may not be a mountaintop,
but after that day,
all the world is changed.

For even still today,
God is taking
all that seems dirty,
all that seems humble,
all that seems human,
and transfiguring it
into his own likeness.

Here, he takes bread and wine.
Here, he takes sin and shame.
Here, he takes you and me.

And he pours the light of his love through it all,
giving us nothing less than his very self
through all that seems so fragile and frail.

So come.
Come and look on God face to face,
and be transformed.

Amen.