

Feast of the Transfiguration

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Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Peter 1:13-21

Luke 9:28-36

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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.