

Transfiguration
3/3/2019

Mark the Evangelist

Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-43a

The divinity of the humanity of God

Sermon preached by Andrew Gador-Whyte

In a sentence

“The Transfiguration reveals that in the darkness of the Cross, God has claimed the world as his kingdom and disclosed our nature in Jesus as his daughters and sons.”

Today all mortal nature shines with the divine Transfiguration

And cries with exultation:

“Christ the Saviour is transfigured to save us all!”

This is one of the hymns of the Orthodox Church.

The Transfiguration, which we are celebrating today, is the event where the disciples see Jesus revealed as God.

It is the event that reveals Jesus’ coming suffering and death as his coming to reign on earth, and as the fulfillment of the hope contained in the Law and the Prophets.

And it is the event that reveals the glory of God in every human face.

In identifying with the life of his creation, God has unveiled the divine light shining in everything that he has made.

In their Transfigured Lord, the nations not only find their salvation, but are themselves unveiled as a means of God’s saving grace, as sharers in God’s own life.

The Transfiguration sits between the feeding of the five thousand and the healing of an epileptic boy. Luke connects the Transfiguration with abundant life in Christ and the restoration of bodies and relationships to the fullness of life.

But just before our narrative, Peter names Jesus as the Messiah. And Jesus claims this title in a disturbing and disorienting way.

The anointed one, the heir, the Son, is the one who will be rejected, suffer and die, and on the third day, rise. And being his disciples means taking up his cross.

This is the disturbing context for the Transfiguration.

Luke wants to show that the revelation of Jesus as God is bound together with his suffering. In his divinity, Jesus does not stand apart from the alienation of the world.

The Transfiguration shows that the way God has come to reign among us is by taking up the cross. In the place where Jesus shares completely in our weakness, alienation and death, on the cross – that is where he will be most fully revealed.

Jesus goes up the mountain with the three disciples. Suddenly Jesus is visible shining with the light of God. Moses and Elijah are there speaking to him, and speaking about his Exodus. Moses represents the Law, Elijah represents the Prophets.

Here God reveals that everything that Moses spoke in the law was addressed to Jesus Christ.

Everything God spoke through the prophets was the Word coming to dwell in the life of God's people.

From the beginning, God's word in Law and Prophecy was revealing Jesus' reconciling suffering and death.

The Word who was in the beginning with God is the thread running, sometimes hidden, through the life of God's chosen people.

In the Transfiguration, that thread is now revealed as a seamless robe.

Seeing Jesus in glory with Moses and Elijah, all Peter can stammer is 'let me pitch three tents for you'.

But perhaps he recognises that at the Transfiguration, the whole story of the chosen people – their wanderings and living in tents, their worship and their sufferings – is gathered up in this person.

But here the disciples are terrified by the voice of the Father, and the Holy Spirit descending like a cloud.

Luke picks up the Exodus story. In the cloud, Moses hears God speak the beginning of the Law - 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt'

At the transfiguration, the disciples hear God speak the beginning of the Law, the word before all things. 'This is my Son, My Chosen; listen to him!'

On this person, on this Word, hang all the law and the prophets.

Those who look and hear and obey his voice are daughters and sons of the covenant.

Here God has made possible a life of unbroken fellowship with him, simply and only through entering into life with this person.

This Son is the one from whom every daughterhood and sonship in heaven and on earth takes its name.

Now when Jesus and the disciples descend the mountain, they are immediately confronted by a man crying out to Jesus: 'This is my son, my only child - Look at him!'

The child is in the grip of a spirit that threatens to destroy him.

When it seizes him, his voice and movements lose their meaning. He can no longer do what sons do.

Jesus simply speaks. When he rebukes the spirit, he calls the boy back to his life as a son.

Jesus gives him back to his father. He restores him to life and communion.

It is as though Jesus says to the unclean spirit, 'This is my son, my chosen - listen to him.'

And the Father says to each of us as he says to this boy: 'You are to me as my Son Jesus is to me. Though in the world's darkness your glory is hidden, yet from the foundation of the world, I have known you as daughter, as son.'

If anything separates us from life as child, as heir, of this God, Jesus has been there before us at Golgotha. Though we have forgotten our glory, Jesus has remembered who we are. In being born among us, Jesus became as we are.

At the Transfiguration, for a moment Jesus was shown to us as he most fully is.

His life was revealed to us there, as an unbroken and unchanging exchange of love with the Father, as perfectly attuned to the love and the will of the Father.

And here Luke foreshadows that soon *our* nature as daughters and sons of God will be disclosed.

Because the divine Son will go before us to the place of the Skull.

There everything that hides our nature as God's children will be pierced through by the light of God.

The Transfiguration reveals Jesus' identity as the eternal Son of the Father, who revealed his glory in sharing absolutely in the suffering and alienation of the world.

Like the crowd, we see one who gathers up all the promises of the Law of Moses.

Yet he will go to the place where he will share with us utterly in our being outcasts under the law.

When we saw the light of the Transfiguration, the light of God exposed the darkness of our life. We look to the transfigured Jesus, and find our lack of love judged by the love of God.

And at the same time, we find ourselves clothed in baptismal radiance.

Here the darkened rooms of our hearts have been flooded with light, and we have become a dwelling place, not only for Moses and Elijah, but for God himself, and five thousand or so hungry Galileans.

At our baptism, we too were robed in dazzling white. We were claimed with the same voice that claimed Jesus on Mount Tabor.

In baptism, and at this table, we have been incorporated into life together as God's children.

Here, at his table we are transfigured.

Here he makes us to shine with our true nature, which is to be a source of God's grace to our neighbour and our enemy.

Jesus is with us at his table, as guest and host, as the very stuff of life, as the forgiving neighbour who makes possible life together again.

In the Transfiguration God has adopted us simply as those he created in Christ.

We belong to him through his love alone, in spite of all our strivings to free ourselves from guilt, from death, from association with evil.

God has adopted us so that we might live as sources of reconciliation and healing, as means of others' coming in touch with the reconciling love of Jesus Christ.

However scarred and distorted our lives are, God makes each of us a means of others being restored to life and to relationship with one another.

God has called us his children so that we might know the joy of sharing in the suffering love of Christ, the joy of joining him on the road from Mount Tabor to the Cross.

In the Transfiguration, we saw Jesus revealed as God.

We saw Jesus coming' suffering and death as the fulfilment of God's promises and the coming of God to reign among us.

We saw Jesus claimed as God's Son.

And we found ourselves shining with the light of Christ, adopted as God's children, becoming sharers in God's life, and sharers in the sufferings of Christ.

May we become in Jesus a source of others' healing from everything that hides their nature as God's children.

May our lives become to all nations an invitation into the light of Christ.
