

Second Sunday of Lent

March 5, 2023

The Gospel today features the Transfiguration of Jesus upon the mountaintop. It is illuminating to examine Peter's reactions to seeing Jesus transformed, as his response is not so different from our own when we are presented with moments in which we brush up against the Divine and find ourselves transformed.

One chapter earlier, Peter names Jesus as the Christ. In doing so, he demonstrates an intellectual understanding of what is unfolding. However, this mountaintop experience in which Peter *sees* Jesus transfigured allows this understanding to sink down into a deeper, experiential level. So it often is with us—we start to understand something, but it is not yet in our bones.

Peter's first response to this extraordinary moment is to offer to build dwelling places for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. He is trying to *do* something with the experience, instead of dwelling in it and letting it unfold. He is trying to find a way to capture something that cannot be captured, to prolong it and concretize it. So it often is with us when we have experiences that transcend our everyday awareness.

But Peter is interrupted by the voice of God exhorting him to *listen*, to just be with the moment, which overwhelms and terrifies him. This seems to jolt Peter out of his self-consciousness, his need to grasp and cling, his need to find something to *do*. Moments of true transfiguration require a letting go of our habitual ways of being, as terrifying as that is. Here again, we hear the oft-repeated counsel to not be afraid just as we most need it.

Finally, Jesus tells his companions not to speak of this to anyone. And so it is with moments in our lives in which we find ourselves transformed—they often *cannot* be talked about. They certainly cannot be explained to someone who has not had such experiences. We must come down from the mountaintop, carrying the experience silently in our hearts, not looking any different than we did before ascending the mountain, though we have indeed been transformed by what we witnessed there.