

On this last Sunday before the season of Lent begins, we remember and consider our Lord Jesus' incredible transfiguration. For the disciples involved in this transfiguration situation, following Jesus to the top of a mountain and seeing this blindingly radiant transformation was quite the formative and question-raising situation. Remember, these disciples are some low-key fishermen and tradesmen who left everything behind to follow Jesus, the Messiah, the holy teacher and healer and minister, so they're already having their lives, their spirits, the way they exist in the world totally transformed. So add this on top of all this ministry and change, and it certainly would be overwhelming and fearful.

The story of Jesus' transfiguration is a story of God's revelation, of all the ways God has revealed Godself throughout the stories of the scriptures. Jesus is met on the mountaintop with two other figures, Moses and Elijah, connecting the story of Jesus with the stories and prophets of old - making a direct connection to the lineage of who God is for and how God shows up in the world, how God chooses to reveal Godself to his beloved humans.

God works in these moments of revelation, even now, in ways that we may not expect and may even terrify us upon the first encounter. But there is a deep comfort that comes from these moments of revelation, of God calling us closer to him. We are part of this blessed communion of saints, joined with our faithful forebears by the power of the Holy Spirit, and with these disciples who experienced something incredible. I can't read this story and not think about how it played out for them.

As the disciples journeyed up the mountain, the first figure that appeared with Jesus was Moses, the one chosen by God to lead the people Israel from slavery into freedom, crossing the Red Sea, guiding them through the wilderness for generations, and bringing God's laws to the people - God's covenantal promises to be their God, and we to be God's people. Moses represented God's law, God's guidance, and God's promises to all people. These laws and promises have carried thousands of years of faithful people through unimaginable struggles and hardships and continue to give us guidance and new life, even here and today. These reminders of God's

law and promises were meaningful to the disciples who joined Jesus on the mountain because they were reminders of history, law, and how far Israel had come up to that point, of being in the presence of the Messiah, and hearing the voice of God proclaiming love on the mountaintop. Both incredible and terrifying at the same time, for sure.

The second figure that stood on the mountain was the figure of Elijah - a well-known and highly respected prophet from Israel's history, who lived roughly 800 years before Jesus. No one was 100% sure about the circumstances of Elijah's death, and the way it's written (and the way the story was passed down) was Elijah ascending into heaven by fire. Some even wondered if Jesus was Elijah brought back to life, having such a close connection with God and bringing God's words to the Hebrew people of the time. But on this mountaintop, Elijah represented God's prophets, that God's word and wisdom is revealed to the people through the people, that God speaks truth into the present moment of what the conditions are and what is to come. God is deeply involved and woven into the fabric of the human world, God's creation, human life itself, and the disciples took in this prophetic presence with great awe.

So seeing Jesus on this mountaintop with two of the most famous, faithful forebears in their world was nothing short of both amazing and terrifying. It seems natural to want to lean into the amazing part of that experience, and build dwelling places to remain with these ancestors who brought God so much closer to them in the human life. Why wouldn't they want to linger and lift up the place in which they were so close to God our creator?

And this is where the terrifying part comes in. In our human life, in our human world, there are things that do in fact bring us closer to God and reveal God's love and work for humanity, our calling to love God and neighbors in all we do, but they terrify us. They make us uncomfortable and challenge us to think differently. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we may feel discomfort but ultimately our actions do something good and loving for our neighbors. Sometimes we are shaken up in our hearts, minds, and spirits, but through relying on God in prayer and spiritual

practices, we end up finding God in the journey through what was challenging or uncomfortable. We have zero control over how God chooses to reveal Godself to us. Yes, we have the incredible, life-saving gifts of leaning on God's promises, God's laws and covenants, the wisdom of the prophets and the miraculous new life given to us by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But what the life-saving love of God looks and feels like for each of us is as unique as our individual journeys and lives are too. Sometimes it's important to take a pause and ask ourselves, with God's help, some questions, like the one my colleague Pastor Alissa Kretzmann Farrar poses: "What if that thing which left me unsettled was actually God moving in the world?" Or, sometimes God's revelation can leave us asking a simple, "What the heck is happening?!" I imagine the disciples' processing questions were something closer to the latter.

But ultimately, in the questions, in the revelations, in the mountaintops and terrors and visions and wisdom, there is one thing anchoring us to what is real, what is true, what is the path forward for us all. And that is Jesus Christ. Even through this experience of His transfiguration, of dazzling radiance and change, at the end of it, the disciples were left with only Jesus. There was no one else around, no grand visions of forebears and prophets, but only Jesus. And that reality, of only Jesus walking alongside of us, can give us great comfort. No matter what we have endured, seen, experienced, thought, processed, anything, only Jesus remains to walk with us, down from the mountain and into what lies ahead in the journey.

Sometimes we can grieve for what happened before a stunning event - stunning in both a good, bad, or somewhere in between kind of way. I imagine the disciples held a grief for what following Jesus was like before this transfiguration event. Before that point, the work of discipleship, of following Jesus, was about healing and teaching, traveling and tending to people, feeding and praying, living into the promises of love for humanity made real in the person of Christ Jesus, the Messiah. And after the transfiguration, there was a new level of holiness, of connectedness to God and the spiritual traditions of which they were part. There was a depth that

wasn't there before, that they had to keep to themselves, tell no one until Jesus' death and resurrection. That's a pretty big event to keep to yourself!

But from the disciples' journey and encounters, we learn that even though our encounters with God may bring about fear or terror, Jesus is still with us through them. Jesus is deeply connected to all the ways God shows up in our world, and in the end, only He remains to walk with us. And though that fear may last through the night, there is joy that comes in the morning. There is radiance, transformation, and change that comes from having revelatory experiences of God and continuing to walk with Jesus Christ. And in that discipleship, of listening to and walking with Christ, we can begin to transform the things in our world that need that power of God, the power of all the generations of beloved people before and after us, to bring about change and new life. This new life in every time and place, is the unique promise of Jesus' death and resurrection, made alive for us every single day. Thanks be to God for the transformative power of Jesus and His love. Amen.