

“Lent—Time for Transformation”

Sermon by Pastor Dan Harrison, Church of the Covenant, 3/3/19

Luke 9:28-35, (37-40)

Today I will do something slightly different. I will exegete a passage from the Bible. I don't usually do this nowadays, but today, I feel the urge. I will ask us to listen as I read from Luke 9, beginning with verse 28, *“About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”*

So, there was a change in Jesus' physical appearance. Some say it was God's glory, much like what we read about Moses earlier—when he returned from the mountain. One thing is for sure, it was a physical manifestation of an encounter with God. Jesus had changed during prayer. Have you ever walked away from an encounter with God, changed? Transformed. Let me continue to read (verses 30-31): *“Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”* Here we have symbols of the Jewish Law, Moses, and the Jewish prophets, Elijah. In Jesus' physical and spiritual transformation within the presence of God, the symbols of Jewish culture, Jewish history, Jewish life manifested itself in the symbols of Moses and Elijah. There is an affirmation of one's culture and race when in the presence of God. Our identity as individuals, each unique, is clearly designed by God for God's creation, loved and treasured. In the same way when we encounter God, we are affirmed in who we are, whether our race, our gender, our sexuality, our very being—we are completely loved by God—every part of us!

Let's continue with the story (verses 32-35): *“Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.’”* The disciples are affected by what they see. It says they don't even know what to do. They are confused but somehow encouraged. While still in the presence of God, Jesus who was having a personal encounter with God—this encounter extended to the disciples. It makes me think when we encounter God, others around us encounter God too. God's presence is not exclusive. It is inclusive. No one is barred from it. We are all welcome to it.

Then I think the last part of this story is perhaps the most profound of all (verses 37-40): *“The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, ‘Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.’”* Here, the logical step after encountering God is encountering God's creation—humanity. With all of its brokenness, flaws, and suffering. Having an inward encounter with God quickly spreads to an outward expression of love. We change, and then we are able to help others. We don't change others. We can only love others. Our solo encounter with God transforms us and then transforms others through love, nothing more, nothing less. No agenda. No arrogance. No exclusivity. God's love has no borders,

nor should we. But it begins with our honest encounter with the Creator. During this season of Lent (Cuaresma) in which we give up something or perhaps add something, a discipline or new practice. I want to encourage us to reflect. This Wednesday begins Lent. In fact we have a pancake supper here at 6pm and then a short Ash Wednesday service at 7pm—I hope you all can join us. But as we prepare for Ash Wednesday in which we commit to 40 days of fasting something, giving up something (whether a bad habit or unhelpful practice) or perhaps add a new practice (like meditation or walking or exercise), I want you to begin that process now. Determine what it is God is changing about you. What does your personal transformation begin with this year? I am handing out these orange cards, in hopes that you will eventually write down what this change will be. You may not know yet. But my hope is that you will write it down and commit to it. And with it, you will commit to yourself, that you will strive to encounter God every day over the next 40 days. World transformation begins with personal transformation.