

Luke 9:28-45 Narrative Lectionary 068: Transfiguration
10 Feb. 13

“What God Wants”

I want to begin by asking you to imagine what it might have been like for the disciples to be present on that mountain top as Jesus is transfigured and speaks with Moses and Elijah. Luke tells us that they were weighed down with sleep. So maybe what took place seemed to them like a dream. I'm suggesting it wasn't real; I am saying it was a dream-like reality. Perhaps you have had a similar experience or two.

Another way to think of it is to say that this was a mystical experience. A mystical experience occurs when a person experiences God's presence in a sure and certain way. Mystics are people who have had these sure and certain experiences of God, even if they can't fully describe them. They exhibit a rare kind of courage and self-confidence. The experience changes them. So a mystic doesn't say, "I believe;" a mystic says, "I know." On the mountain of Transfiguration Peter, James, and John begin this journey. They begin the journey that will give them strength and courage and incredible boldness. They take the first steps of the journey from "I believe," to, "I know." As the ensuing stories will show beyond any doubt, these disciples will still have a long, long way to go before they are able to truly say, "I know and love God," but they've made a start.

Have you ever had a sure and certain experience of God? I know several people who have, though most are reluctant to talk much about it. But for most it has started them on that journey from "I believe," to, "I know." Please note, however, that of all the people who were following Jesus, only twelve were singled out to be apostles. And of those twelve, only three were up there on the mount of transfiguration. Nevertheless, knowing and loving God is something greatly to be wanted and pursued.

Speaking of wanting, what do you think God most wants of us? Well, if you take Jesus at his word, what God most wants from us is our love. When asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus said it's to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and mind—and also to love your neighbor as yourself, because true love of God always spills out to the world God loves. And to truly and fully love God, you have to know God. You cannot love what you do not know.

So here's what we're aiming for in the confirmation class. We're not after the confirmands knowing more about God or the Bible—though that is necessary and is part of what we're doing. But that's only the start of a long journey. The next part of the journey is slowly learning to trust the God of the Bible. And the next part of the journey is learning to love this God. That's what God most wants. *That's* what we're aiming for. The catechetical experience, short as it is, is designed to help our 9th graders know more about God, learn to more fully trust this God, and fall in love with the God who loves them. Where do you think you are on this long journey?

And by the way, what does love of God lead to? It lead to the same sort of thing that genuine human love leads to: richer life, fuller life, new life. There is a purpose behind the vision granted

to Peter, James, and John. Part of the purpose is to confirm what Peter had confessed when Jesus asked him who he thought he was. "Some say Moses or Elijah," Peter answered, "but I say you're the Messiah." So now Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah and God's voice is heard saying, "This is my son, my chosen. Listen to him!"

But oddly, what Jesus and Moses and Elijah are talking about up there on that mountain is Jesus' coming crucifixion. "They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." This transfiguration is a mountaintop experience but not the kind about which people write glowingly of sunrises, soft breezes, warm friends, music, and quiet time. On this mountain the subject is death, and the frightening presence of God reduces those present to silence.

Peter, James, and John are going to need a lot of faith and a lot of strength to make this journey with Jesus. Even with all the help they get, they still don't quite make it to the end. But at least they're still in Jerusalem for the resurrection. And then, after the resurrection, they will remember, understand, and not feel heavy. In fact, they will speak about what they have seen and heard everywhere they go.

And then they will be drawn into Jesus' mission of embracing the world, loving the world, and bringing new life to it. A genuine mystical experience of God, leads to something. It leads to knowing God--which leads to loving God--which leads to loving God's broken world and being a healer in it.

Only love can draw us into this mission. Only *God's* love can draw us into this mission. Only God's love can keep us on this long, long journey. To quote today's prayer of the day, "Dazzling Lord, show what you desire of us and how to broadcast your love to the world."