

Last Sunday after Epiphany Year A

Transformation

[RCL] Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2 or 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

It had been a long, multi-year mission with not much to show for it except threats from the rulers of occupied Israel and the religious authorities. Despite countless healings of the sick, large crowds coming out to hear him, miracles of feeding the hungry, they were still a small band of disciples. They surely wondered if the only reason people came out to hear him was for a diversion, and entertainment, a distraction from everyday drudgery. And maybe a good debate between the synagogue gurus and Jesus, just for fun.

And all that time they had wondered, seldom daring to ask, ‘Who are you?’

Now it seems like the threats and hatred are building to a crescendo, and Jesus wants to go up to Jerusalem. Surely he understands the danger to himself and to his small band of loyal followers?

But they keep following him, nevertheless. Pondering, bickering amongst themselves about who should be the greatest among them, and who should sit next to him in this kingdom he keeps talking about.

When Jesus invites three of his closest friends to come with him up on a mountain to pray, they willingly go, unprepared for what is to happen next.

Seeing Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus in a visionary experience, and then hearing a voice saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” is astonishing, in fact overwhelming. They fall to the ground in fear.

The experience of the Transfiguration is not possible to overstate. It comes to us full of meaning, as assurance of God’s affirmation of Jesus and our humanity. There is no need to explain it further. It is a singular experience given to all who seek to know who Jesus is, and what lies ahead for people of faith. Jesus radically recalls our humanity and affirms our nature with his divinity. The Kingdom of God has entered the world in human form, and we are called to witness to that Good News.

The reading from Second Peter describes the situation well: “We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 16).

The Transfiguration and empowering Resurrection give the disciples the will to persevere, something bestowed on all of us in our Baptism (see page 308 in *The Book of Common Prayer*). The same God

who presides at the Transfiguration of Jesus and promises us that one day we will be transformed into his likeness, baptizes us into the faith that promises the transformation of people.

While that is glorious and reassuring, it does not give us permission to close the doors of our hearts and minds while we sit around and wait for the return of Christ. Rather, it empowers us to live like people of conviction and redemption in a world badly in need of both.

If we are to participate in Lent as an exercise of self-examination and repentance, let that be acted out with kindness and grace. If we are to mark the coming period with fasting and prayer, let it also be a time when we set aside personal pleasures and work for the relief of suffering of others. If Lent is to be a journey to the Cross, let it be a journey where we allow ourselves to be taken to places and people as God needs us, for that will pattern our lives after Peter, James and John and the other disciples.

A woman from a small southern town recently visited her daughter in a major U.S. city. While there she participated in one of the women's marches that took place across the world that weekend in January. She said she participated because she thought it would help her express her concerns about her own political beliefs. After the march she said she realized the experience transformed her. She now no longer feels anger and frustration, but hope and opportunity, knowing there are millions of people who share her hopes and dreams and are concerned about the welfare of others and the future of God's world.

Will there be days of frustration and doubt? Yes. But the mission to proclaim God's kingdom and to witness it however we are called to do so remains unchanged.

The Transfiguration is our mountain top experience. While we might like to remain there, we return to the world to assist in God's project, which is nothing less than the redemption of the world through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

May this Lent be a time of renewal and grace for us all, and may it be filled with finding new ways and opportunities to witness to God who found in Jesus, his Son, all that is pleasing in the lives of men and women. That same God gives us the Transfiguration that becomes our sign of being changed into his likeness. Amen

Written by Ben Helmer. Helmer is a retired Episcopal priest who served small congregations in Kansas, Michigan, Missouri and Arkansas. He was officer for rural and small community ministries for the Episcopal Church from 1999-2005.

Published by the Office of Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. © 2017 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.