

THE TRANSFIGURATION

All Years

This Bible study was written by Sandi Albom of the Episcopal Divinity School in 2017.

Exodus 34:29-35

²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³² Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face, ³⁴ but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off until he came out, and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining, and Moses would put the veil on his face again until he went in to speak with him.

Discussion Questions

Moses veils his face unless he is with God or speaking God's word to the people. Why do you think that is?

How is your faith visible to others?

Commentary from Sandi Albom

Moses returns to the people with the gift of the tablets of the covenant in his arms. He has been speaking with God "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Ex 33:7-11). The Israelites stand in awe of the startling effect of Moses' shining face. And the people are frightened by the change in him.

Moses calls the people close to hear God's most holy words to them and to share in the renewed covenant. Eventually, despite their fear of the change in him, they come—the radiance of his face evidence of God working within him.

Don't we long to be in the presence of our Creator? We pray for that very thing, to see the face of God, to be there with the Presence, to know what it is like. And indeed, it is a scary thing, knowing we will certainly be changed by the experience. Might others turn away, afraid of our shining faces and the truth we speak?

What has been your experience of speaking God's word to others? Do you think they see you differently afterward?

Psalm 99

- ¹ [The Lord is King;
let the people tremble; *
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.
- ² The Lord is great in Zion; *
he is high above all peoples.
- ³ Let them confess his Name, which is great and
awesome; *
he is the Holy One.
- ⁴ "O mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity; *
you have executed justice and righteousness in
Jacob."]
- ⁵ Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God
and fall down before his footstool; *
he is the Holy One.
- ⁶ Moses and Aaron among his priests,
and Samuel among those who call upon his
Name, *
they called upon the Lord, and he answered
them.
- ⁷ He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; *
they kept his testimonies and the decree that
he gave them.
- ⁸ O Lord our God, you answered them indeed; *
you were a God who forgave them,
yet punished them for their evil deeds.
- ⁹ Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God
and worship him upon his holy hill; *
for the Lord our God is the Holy One.

Discussion Questions

Where do you find boundaries and structure help you in your relationship with God and others?

Are there “lesser gods” in your life that compete for your time with the Beloved?

Commentary from Sandi Albom

Psalm 99 is the last of the “enthronement psalms” where we have a vision of God seated above all in the highest of holy places: in this case, upon the very Ark of the Covenant. In her translation of Psalm 99, Nan Merrill writes, “Awaken you people! Entrust your hearts to Love” (*Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*). In the face of very Love, the leaders of the world bow down and proclaim the mighty King, the lover of justice, who brings equity.

The psalmist, keenly aware of the failings of human kings and of the effect of their failings on the people, recalls for them their ancestral relationship with the Lord God. God is a king who can be relied upon to bring justice and mercy, while also holding us accountable. There are safety and assurance in boundaries and covenant. We know where God stands: God stands with us.

“Awaken you people, entrust your hearts to Love.”

2 Peter 1:13-21

¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, ¹⁴ since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

¹⁶ For 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. ¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹ So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, ²¹ because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Discussion Questions

With the many interpretations of truth that swirl around us, where do you look for guidance and counsel?

This letter, purportedly written by Peter, apostle of Jesus, was most likely written by a later prophetic author. How does that change, if at all, how we might unlock our own interpretation of the “eyewitness” testimony?

Commentary from Sandi Albom

The author of 2 Peter is obviously concerned about authority, credibility, and trust. We aren’t sure to whom he is referring when he contrasts “cleverly devised myths” with the eyewitness account of the Transfiguration. His are not words of boasting, but of concern that the readers or listeners know the truth of Jesus Christ, the Beloved Son of the Majestic Glory.

The writer also makes it clear that the Bible is a powerful and dangerous text, not to be interpreted without careful discernment and reliance upon the Spirit as mediator. In the Early Church, it was important (as it is for us today) to have confidence in those that interpreted Scripture. Prophecy never begins and ends with human beings, but from and with the Holy Spirit who enlightens our efforts, that the Word may serve as a lamp to illumine our hearts.

Luke 9:28-36

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but as they awoke they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah," not realizing what he was saying. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

fading days or perhaps hours later? Unfortunately, we can't stop time. Perhaps what we might seek to transfigure is how we see the world in the light of Christ, and then to reflect that out to the world.

Discussion Questions

What are some ways we can listen to Jesus' voice that might transfigure our lives?

Commentary from Sandi Albom

The telling of the Transfiguration is found in all three synoptic gospels. All have similar elements – Jesus' changing appearance, his shining face and dazzling white garments, the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and the cloud from which God affirms Jesus' authority, giving a foretaste of his glory as the Son of the Most High. The differences in Luke's gospel lie in some specifics related to the conversation Jesus has with Elijah and Moses.

"They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." Here Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, bear witness to Jesus' departure, his exodus, as still another saving act of God. Jesus and his companions will now begin the journey, traveling from the mountaintop to the valley, and from there the glory of God in Christ Jesus will be made known to all the nations.

We can't blame Peter for wanting to hold onto the three shining figures transfigured by their proximity to the Holy One. How many times have we experienced the shining of Christ in our lives in a moment of inspired worship and prayer, only to find the image

How do you shine the light of Christ in small and not-so-small ways?