

In both our Gospel and our Hebrew Bible reading we're shown what we might expect from getting close to God. Do you ever wonder what it was like to be there? Seeing your beloved Jesus become a body of light? The air shimmers, buckles and folds with light, with Presence, with unbearable knowledge. Our minds are stretched beyond what we imagine is possible. Our hearts? Maybe they're thumping with terror, or splitting open with amazement... We might think we're going blind.

Peter wants to nail it down - build the traditional booths or shelters. Make a shrine. Do *something* that is 'normal'. But no. He barely has the words out when they are over-shadowed. Or as one scholar puts it "They are driven to the ground." And it's only the touch of Jesus that makes it possible for them to stand again. But we know they are not the same now. They're not the same after this apocalyptic experience. We wouldn't be either!

What are we meant to take from it?

First, this is a pivot point - the urgency of Jesus' mission now begins to build. From here on, Jesus is not simply creating a following, teaching people, becoming known. After this mountain-top moment, Jesus will be turning his inner compass towards Jerusalem, towards his own death. Towards the conquering of death. But only through death.

Second, this is a moment of confirmation for the disciples - this Jesus really is the true son of God. The Messiah. The Anointed One.

Third, this is a moment of great fear, even terror for the disciples. They're face-to-face with the dreadful God-reality of their beloved teacher. And they're face-to-face with his gentleness. Such over-whelming paradox. The one who terrifies with being so obviously *more than* human is also the one who touches them with love, tenderly reassuring them - they're not in danger.

For a first century person, the transfiguration is *not* incomprehensible. *Not* a mind-shattering moment. Terrifying? Yes. Over-whelming? Definitely. Beyond human understanding? No. They know about Moses. They know he came down from the mountain so 'illuminated' that no-one could bear to look at him.

Didn't he have to cover his face? Seeing Jesus like this? OK And they live through it too - they're not annihilated. Whew!

But for us in the age of reason? Not so easy. We don't believe in magic! We're not superstitious - right?

I bet many of you here see this symbolically, right? - it's a vivid use of words as metaphor. For others of you, transfiguration might be squirmy, uncomfortable - it's just way too magical and other-worldly. And for a few of you, it might actually fit with your own personal mystical experiences of the sacred, of God. And even then - whew!

So whoever we are, whichever our understanding - the transfiguration is challenging. And we might be very ready to feel that gentle hand on *our* shoulder - "Get up and don't be afraid."

And here's what I want to know: what was this like for Jesus? Was he terrified? Was he in the middle of discovering his humanity and his God-nature at the same time? And here's what I believe: the urgency of what he came to teach, the limited time he had to carry that out, the essential truth of his teaching and healing - these were so utterly crucial and fundamental to him, so urgently needed, so desperately necessary that his passion for that as Christ, overcame his fears and misgivings as a human. I believe the Sacred part of him was utterly focused on pouring the truth of love, mercy, kindness, justice into as many people as possible. And the human part of him informed and illuminated how to go about it.

So. Where does that leave us? Challenged. Challenged to reach deep within ourselves for some scrap of our own divinity. Challenged to follow that same path - to life through death of *some* kind. And challenged to admit - we don't have all the answers. In fact, sometimes we have hardly any answers at all. **So it's good to be here together, knowing we do not have the answers - we do not really know who God is. We have lots of heart-inspired intuitions and oodles of educated guesses. In fact we'd do well to be suspicious of easy answers about God. And certainties. Certainty is a very dangerous thing!** Let us pray:

Gentle me,  
 Holy One  
     into an unclenched moment,  
         a deep breath  
             a letting go  
                 of heavy experiences,  
                 of shrivelling anxieties,  
                 of dead certainties. [pause]  
 that, softened by the silence,  
     surrounded by the light  
         and open to the mystery,  
 I may be found by wholeness  
     upheld by the unfathomable,  
     entranced by the simple  
         and filled with the joy  
             that is you.

*Ted Loder*

Amen.