

“Leave our Place”

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Matthew 17.1-9
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The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is a call to his disciples to stop looking up, to pay attention to what is happening around us. It is assuming our mission as Church and as ambassadors of the Kingdom.

"Mission" is derived from the Latin word "mittere," which means "to send." It entered the Christian lexicon in the 16th century during the Age of Discovery and the expansion of European imperialist power into the “New World”. However, the concept of the mission – to spread the teaching of Jesus Christ – dates back to the first century and Paul of Tarsus. We are all familiar with the dramatic conversion story of Paul on the road to Damascus. And it would be safe to say that this transfiguring encounter with God is what compelled Paul “to tell the story of things not seen, of Jesus and his glory of Jesus and his love” – what compelled him to be a missionary

Our gospel reading this Sunday is the account of the Transfiguration of Jesus from Matthew. Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a mountain where he is in conversation with Moses and Elijah – a symbol that the ancestors recognized Jesus as the one who has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. And the meeting seems all very well until the voice of God speaking from a cloud of light, whereupon the three disciples of Jesus fall "face down on the ground, terrified."

Icons from the transfiguration story show the three disciples on their hands and on their knees, cowering, they crawl away and cover their faces. They are elevated, isolated and vulnerable. And while at this point in Matthew's gospel at least one of them, Peter, acknowledged that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," he and his friends quickly forgot Jesus' divinity upon realizing that they had no control in the presence of God penetrating the human realm.

At this time the lives of these disciples began to change, and the change frightened them. However, very gently, Jesus looked at his friends and said, "Do not be afraid." And then he took them down the mountain in the midst of human misery and need. They had seen that God was real, and now he could go tell the story people needed to know.

Jesus called them to be uncomfortable, and reminded them not to be afraid.

Very often, the people of the church, like Peter, James and John, are very reluctant to change, we have become used to being comfortable in our customs and traditions. Many of us do not prefer change.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., described widespread ills in the world; such as racism, militarism and materialism. The limitations of our eyes and ears sometimes make God's goodness impossible to comprehend.

However, Jesus calls us to be uncomfortable, and he reminds us not to be afraid. The unwillingness to change is in direct contradiction to the very nature of the universe of which we are a part, and of which God is at the center. The unwillingness to change is in direct contradiction to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, to go "make disciples of all nations."

The unwillingness to change is ultimately un-Christian, because it is a selfish abandonment of our responsibility as bearers of the Good News, forcing us to get up and go.

However, in our Gospel reading today, Jesus calls us to transgress our comfort zones and be transfigured, to be transformed into the very likeness of God.

Jesus calls us to be uncomfortable, and reminds us not to be afraid.

Once we have been on the Mount of Transfiguration and blessed with the knowledge that we are one with the entire universe – and one with others in nature and God – then

we cannot stop telling the story, walking as one ever-changing being. transfiguration. In fact, the transfigured person dedicates his life to achieving God's peace on earth.

A Franciscan prayer asks God to bless us “with restlessness over easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships...with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people...with tears that are shed for those who they suffer pain, they are rejected, hungry and at war”.

Wherever we are, let us seek the transfiguring presence of God, it is time to descend the mountain and enter uncomfortable places, to be a transfiguring presence in the lives of others.