

02-11-24     **Transfiguration: Writing a Positive Future Story**

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

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You know, there just aren't a lot of songs on the radio about the Transfiguration. Or in the hymnal for that matter. It's not really a sing-a-long, tap your toes, finger snapping kind of an event, is it? There is no baby in the manger to sing off to sleep, no Easter triumph over the finality of death, no animals to put into a big boat 2 by 2, no rescue from the Pharaoh-induced evils of slavery, and certainly no dry bones rising from the valley. I've looked for songs with little success. I played with the idea of writing my own song lyrics - "Moses and Christ and Elijah, soaring so high, like a ...flyjah?" Believe me, I've tried. It just doesn't work.

The transfiguration is an event completely unto itself. The context of the story is the pending journey of Jesus and the disciples to Jerusalem for a final confrontation with religious and state rulers. Before the departure, there's this unique moment of a vision on a mountain that is not just a little confusing.

On the most basic level we would like to know, what were Elijah, Moses and Jesus talking about in this glowing conversation? Did they tell him that they had been in similar positions of being rejected for the message they brought? Did they encourage him and tell him that God was on his side, and everything would work out for the best? Was it more like a pep talk or a warning? Or were they talking about totally unrelated things, like the pitcher's mound scene in the movie, *Bull Durham*...

If nothing else, the two visitors represented a timeline: the past and the future of the faith. Moses was the embodiment of the past Law, the basis of the human/divine covenant.

God's salvation history was working itself out under the leadership of Moses in the exodus of the Jewish people out of Egypt. God rescued the people from enslavement and death.

Elijah was the embodiment of the prophecies of the future or end times. Elijah's words foreshadowed the culmination of God's saving plan, reminding people of the presence of God's word even at the end of time. By meeting with Jesus, Moses and Elijah figuratively placed him in the continuum of God's Story, establishing the past, present and future.

Jesus was envisioned on the mountain between this beginning exodus with Moses, and the end times with Elijah's prophecies. It was a vision of God's salvation being revealed in the most unlikely manner of Jesus' present journey to Jerusalem – the seat of power – where he would become powerless.

This journey to Jerusalem is what we enter beginning on Ash Wednesday with our worship service in the community center at 5:30. At the beginning of the season of Lent, we will put ourselves in the midst of the story, in the context of the beginning and the end, and open ourselves to what might happen in the present.

Andrew Lester, a colleague of mine in Pastoral Theology, wrote a book about Hope, in which he presents the concept of a future story to help people of faith deal with the unknown. He says the future stories we imagine or tell ourselves have stronger influences our present state of mind than our past stories. (repeat) The future stories we imagine or tell ourselves have stronger influences our present state of mind than our past stories. No matter what awful or wonderful thing might have happened to someone in their early years, the thing that most shapes how they feel in the here and now is the story they tell themselves about what the future looks like.

Let's say a woman, Philomena, had a past story: both of her brothers and both parents had cardiac disease and heart attacks at early ages. All of these family members were treated immediately and survived. But this past story of survival did not impact her present life as much as the future story she told herself. Her future story was that she was going to have a heart attack before the age of 50 and die. She lived in dread of the inevitable catastrophe and had difficulty engaging in life. She was unaware how that negative future story obstructed her well-being until she finally said out loud to her doctor, "I'm sure I'm going to die of a heart attack." The doctor paused, and reassured Philomena that the

experiences of her family members did not dictate or determine her health outcomes ... she felt relief for the first time. She began telling herself a positive future story that she would be the only member of her family who would not experience a heart attack. She was freed from living with the heaviness of her imagined negative future story.

This may sound simplistic, but it is tremendously effective. It is possible to reframe a negative future story of failing health, to a positive one of increased strength. It is possible to change a nihilistic projection of the end of life, to an imagined future story of eternal life with God, resulting in a more positive present.

Last Sunday, our conversations with each other and with our facilitators from Three Stories Consultants revealed exactly this dynamic. One question posed to the group was along the lines of “what have the last 4 months been like during the investigation and Glenn’s absence?” The stories of our past were described with words like confusion, trauma, loss, heartbreak, secrets, sadness, chaos, harm and a very poignant “I’m new here” response. We were also asked to respond to the question, “What do you hope for, for your congregation?” The stories of our future were described with words and phrases like: grace, comfort with each other, broad diversity, peace for Glenn, mission-focus, rejuvenation, protecting our most vulnerable, communication, openness, safety, and healing.

You and I have a choice as to how we will BE in the present moment. We can choose to have our present determined by our past stories of pain and disconnection and frustration. We could instead choose to have our present determined by the future stories we tell of growth, togetherness and mutual kindness. A future story can be re-imagined to free us from our own fears of negative futures.

On the mountain, the disciples experience with Jesus a vision of what the future truly holds: Rather than the anticipated pain and anguish awaiting in Jerusalem, the transfiguration revealed Jesus in glory, **untethered** by suffering, rejection and death. The future would hold the Messiah united with Moses (the one who brought the 10 commandments) and united with Elijah (the prophet who sustained the people with hope when they were in captivity).

The transfiguration was a transformation of the disciples’ imagined future story, and our assumptions of what is inevitable. In our life together here at church, we have no way of predicting what our future story will actually be in the next three weeks, the next three

months or the next thirty years. We can choose to imagine a positive future just as the disciples did. A positive future story will carry us through the wilderness of Lent to the next transfiguration, the Resurrection.

Amen.

#### BENEDICTION

My prayer for you in the weeks and months ahead is the growth of your positive future stories, and the transfiguration of any negative ones. I am imagining you drawing closer to each other, finding more events to celebrate, and even more things to laugh about. Enjoy each other, enjoy the new people in your midst, and enjoy the presence of God that will continue to fill and uphold you.

Blessings to you all. Amen.