

The Transfiguration of Our Lord, Gospel, Year B

WONDERFULLY TRANSFORMED

Mark 9:2-9

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

2Six 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, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then 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." 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 9As 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.

Diagnosis: A Distressing Uncovering

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Totally Befuddled Jesus takes the disciples up a high mountain (a typical locale for meeting God) and, what do you know, they "see" Jesus suddenly turn dazzling white—so brilliant they are overwhelmed. (This brings to mind past God-appearances.) They see Jesus chatting with Moses and Elijah. A voice from a cloud announces, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." The disciples decide to build memorials to honor the occasion. But they are befuddled. Even though they get a glimpse of Jesus "revealed" as

God, what still rings in their ears are the last words Jesus has said to them, that he's on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die. This just doesn't compute! How can Jesus be both the glorious Godhead and a convicted criminal on his way to execution? Why not simply fashion Jesus into the #3 guy in a lineup of God-revealers (after Moses and Elijah). That's all that's needed really—someone to give advice, or lead a rebellion.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Totally Terrified
But then again, Peter, James and John are also terrified (9:6). After all, they're face to face with a luminous lord, and scripture and history have taught that it's impossible to meet Yahweh face to face and survive it. Why? Because there's something about a face-to-face encounter with God that penetrates and totally exposes us. Our very-nice-person covers are blown. No more pretending. We're exposed for being not all "right." We are exposed as sinners, that is, egos turned in on our selves and egos not trusting God. We are forced to confess—a word that means "speak the truth together"—to God the harsh reality about ourselves. We are all sinners. Call that the first "revealing."

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Totally Dissed
That means, the jig is up. With covers blown, sinners have to accept their un-rightness and the consequences. Maybe Jesus can help us, we think: "Just show us what to do, Jesus." But Jesus turns away in sorrow. "Not my job. I'm not a teacher, not an insurgent." Bottom line: humans simply cannot morph themselves from sinners into saints, no matter how hard they/we try. AND, the comeuppance for that failure, that un-rightness, is eternal separation from God, also called death.

Prognosis: Jesus' Metamorphosis So that We Can Be Too

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus' Metamorphoses

Thanks be to God Jesus doesn't settle for merely educating sinners. Our condition is much more critical than can be cured by good teaching. Thanks again that the Holy Godhead transforms us—metamorphizes us—from sinners to saints, an absolute impossibility. Yet that's the task the Godhead takes on. For Their scheme to succeed, the Second Member of the Deity undergoes the metamorphosis we call the Incarnation, becoming human like us. On the mountain Peter, James and John got to "see" both of his natures. Only later, after they'd watched Jesus die on a cross and three days later walk out of his grave did they "see" that this was the "cure" for their predicament. "Seeing" Jesus on the cross, they "saw" God suffering with and for them. They "saw" God assume their guilt and take their judgment into God's self and suffer it away. Death itself was defeated—even theirs, even ours.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Sinners' Metamorphoses

And then the disciples "saw" Jesus' right-ness poured into them, their identities morphed from guilty sinner to sinless God-children (saints). Henceforth, Jesus offers to accompany all sinners in their/our God-encounters. Sinners, that is, we grasp Jesus' hand (we call that faith), and that grasping morphs us from sinners into saints. A current flows from Christ's being into ours, and we start to look and talk and act as he does. (That transfusion is affected by the Holy Spirit.) Here's the joy of it all: Jesus doesn't coerce us into companionship. Listen to what he says as he holds his hand out to all: "Let me go with you. I've got you covered." That's an offer too good to refuse. That's sheer gift.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Listening Out Loud

The voice from the cloud said, "Listen." And we do. Our

“listening” becomes not just an aural process but a verbal and physical process. We listen out loud as we tell other people about our amazing walking companion—the one who went to the cross for us. We listen out loud as we squeeze hands, with Jesus on the one side, our friends (maybe even enemies) on the other, and enjoy feeling the current of love and forgiveness ricocheting among us.