

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

February 27, 2022



APPEAR

for when we look different

by Drew Downs

In a surprising moment at the mountaintop, Jesus is *transfigured*. This means that he *appears* to be different (it doesn't necessarily mean that he *is* different). Then two other figures *appear*.

Our rational minds get obsessed with the question of whether or not these guests really *are* there. Or what is causing Jesus to look different. We desire explanations which settle, define, or minimize the impact of

treating what *appears* to be significant as anything but a parlor trick.

But what if transfigure is not *less* than transform? What if appearances *do*, in a sense, matter?

The gospel treats this much like Moses's glowing face: as a sign of an encounter with the divine. What if we did the same for one another?

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Winter 2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Next week kicks off the season of Lent: a time of fasting and penitence. Sometimes it seems like we treat it as a time of solemn moping or sacrificial rigidity. The most famous aspect of the season in common culture is that some people don't eat meat or that Catholics often go to a fish fry. Obviously the season is more than that.

The primary character of the season is to be a season of *reflection*. Since earliest days, it was a time of *instruction* and preparation for newcomers to the faith *and* for the community to learn how to reconcile with those who have caused pain. So to get us *to* that reflection, we sacrifice some of our pleasure as a means of opening our hearts. Think: it is less about willpower and more about openness to difficult ideas.

Our practice of the season begins this year on March 2 with Ash Wednesday. We will have two services that day: Noon and 6 pm. We will also be on campus with United Campus Ministries offering Ashes-to-Go.

You may also join in personal devotions - which come in both serious and light-hearted forms. Our local favorite is "Lent Madness": a bracket-based opportunity to engage with historic saints of the church.

Lastly, we'll be offering a hybrid opportunity to engage with the book *We Shall Be Changed: Questions for the Post-Pandemic Church*.

May this coming season be a time of holy reflection and renewed life.

With love,
Drew

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Winter 2022

FOR SUNDAY

The Last Sunday after Epiphany

February 27, 2022

Collect

○ God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

"You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."

Reflection

Jesus is up a mountain with three of his followers in an event we refer to as The Transfiguration. It is one of the central stories in the gospels. It is also one that continues to confound and challenge its hearers.

Less surprisingly, what happens *up* the mountain always seems to overshadow what happens *down* the mountain after it.

The disciples, who had just returned from traveling all over and healing the sick *themselves* are now stymied while Jesus, Peter, James, and John are away for a handful of hours.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

I think this encounter should be read as *their* being filled with just as much confusion as the Transfiguration. *Because the disciples should be able to handle the problem.*

That's why Jesus's words tear right through me whenever I read them: "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" They hammer home at the moment of what seems like intense failure.

While it would be so much easier to talk about the Transfiguration, its *fallout* is far more troubling. And I have long held the conviction of not *avoiding* the hardest question in the text.

So what do we make of this cry of frustration? This insult to the people? A statement that seems as directed at the disciples and the crowds and the poor guy who came as the bearer of bad news who just wants his son freed? I don't have any easy or comfortable answers. What I do have is an assortment of less-than-comfortable responses. And here's the one that tickles my attention most.

When the disciples go out into the world *themselves*, they are able to be like Jesus. When Jesus seems to give three disciples *special attention*, suddenly the *group* isn't up to the task. We also see in the coming chapters a constant sense of competition which derails them and leads them to constant confusion. There's something about the way they see each other that seems to get to Jesus.

The words, however, sting. They don't just sound like the voice of *his* frustration, but his judgement. But I also don't take them as *permanent* or *descriptive*. He no more appears to be saying this is definitive of *all time* than he is just "blowing off steam."

I suspect that these are words of disappointment. Not because he thinks we are bad, but because we are capable of *so much more than this*. In other words, Jesus knows we *are* capable, talented people. And that we are always worth the effort.

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