**The Sunday Missive – August 6, 2023**

**The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Hymn 7 Christ whose glory fills the skies**

Christ, whose glory fills the skies, Christ, the true, the only Light,  
Sun of Righteousness, arise! Triumph over shades of night;  
Dayspring from on high, be near; daystar, in my heart appear!

Dark and cheerless is the morn unaccompanied by thee;  
Joyless is the day’s return till thy mercy’s beams I see,  
As they inward light impart, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine! Pierce the gloom of sin and grief!  
Fill me, radiancy divine; scatter all my unbelief;  
More and more thyself display, shining to the perfect day.

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD481fXtf-A**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD481fXtf-A)

**The Collect of the Day**

O God, who on the holy mount revealed to chosen witnesses your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistening: Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may by faith behold in his beauty the one who with you the Creator, and you the Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Exodus 34:29-35**

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

**Psalm 99**

The Lord is King; let the people tremble\* ***He is enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth shake.***

The Lord is great in Zion\* ***He is high above all the peoples.***

Let them confess his great and awesome name\* ***And worship the Holy One.***

O mighty King, O lover of justice\* ***You have established equity***

Proclaim the greatness of the Lord\* ***And fall down before his footstool.***

Moses and Aaron among his priests\* ***They called upon the Lord, and he answered them.***

He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud\* ***They kept his testimonies and decrees.***

Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God\* ***And worship him upon his holy hill.***

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV14hjiLSVM**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV14hjiLSVM)

**2 Peter 1:13-21**

I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

**Hymn 488 Be thou my vision**

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
All else be nought to me, save that thou art—  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;  
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;  
Thou my great Father; thine own may I be;  
Thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

High King of heaven, when victory is won,  
May I reach heaven's joys, bright heaven's Sun!  
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiukM6WHQEQ**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiukM6WHQEQ)

**Luke 9:28-36**

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

**Changed for the Better – Transfiguration A**

The purpose of our lection and preaching of holy scripture is, in the elegant phrasing of Cranmer’s Advent collect, “…to hear them, to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life…” We recall that part of what makes the Anglican Church the *via media* (middle way) is the conviction that our beliefs and practices must derive from a thorough integration of a three-legged stool comprising scripture, tradition and reason. Though it is impossible to achieve perfect equilibrium of these, we are teaching and living apart from that *via media* if we stress any of these three in ways that obscure the others. Blending and balancing the three is meant to afford exposure to and tolerance of a wide spectrum of theological belief and traditional opinion, as well as bold and searching talk about how the stories of faith history enable us to think about, understand and formulate the stories of our own, contemporary experience. The Barbie movie shines a bright and discerning light on how things have always been and how they might be, and so does Anglican practice.

Today’s readings are a perfect example of the process of marking and digesting the old as a way of incorporating the new. If we would comprehend Jesus as the totality of the law and the prophets, we would do well to show how he embodies the greatest attributes of traditional heroes of the faith. Moses represents the law, so Jesus on the mountaintop distills the law and shines just like Moses. Elijah was the quintessential prophet; thus, Jesus embodies wisdom and will eventually be whooshed up into heaven just like the ancient one.

When we picture this great scene on the mountaintop, with the small group of apostles witnessing the encounter among Jesus, Moses and Elijah, we see that Jesus has all the attributes of the other two combined, and then some. He represents the culmination of the stories of the law and the prophets, and now he is taking over from them the next era of humanity’s relationship with Almighty God. Whereas all other scriptural heroes must suit their actions to their words, in Jesus, the action is the word; God’s Word – Jesus’ very self – is God’s action. In this sense, Jesus is a verb.

Luke’s literary touch is especially deft. Although we talk about today’s feast as “The Transfiguration of Jesus,” because the other two synoptic Gospels say he was transfigured (*metamorphoo* in the Greek), Luke describes the scene thusly: “The appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white… Peter and his companions were very sleepy; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.” In other words, Jesus did not change, he was not metamorphosized. Instead, like a tadpole becoming a frog, or a chrysalis a butterfly, his true identity became apparent. His people saw it because they stayed awake. Consequently, it was they who were transformed, by their new awareness of God. Better than Color TV, better than HD, 5G, Blu Ray, IMAX and Sensurround too, such a revelation, by any combination of vision and experience, is the beginning of the transformation of all of us who choose to follow Jesus. It is we who have *metamorphoo* in our future, if only we will embrace it.

It is as strange a scene as there is in the Gospels. Even without the voice from the cloud to explain it, they had no doubt what they were witnessing. It was Jesus of Nazareth all right, the man with whom they'd tramped many a dusty mile, whose mother and brothers they knew, the one they'd seen as hungry, tired, and footsore as the rest of them. But it was also the Messiah: Christ in his glory. The holiness of the man shone through his humanity; his face was so afire with it they were almost blinded.

Even with us something like that happens once in a while. The face of a man walking with his child in the park, of a woman baking bread or bathing a baby, of a thousand Swifites listening to a concert, of one of us standing on the sand watching the waves roll in or having a beer at a baseball game in August. Every once in awhile and so very often, something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that its beauty is almost beyond bearing.

No wonder good old Peter wanted to put up some all-weather pop-ups to preserve the party permanently. We love memorializing, making statues and plazas; it’s something humans did long before Jesus, and we’ve been doing it ever since. Tradition! But notice Jesus does not permit dwelling. Instead he goes back to the work of healing. Jesus nods to tradition, before insistently and relentlessly moving straight from scripture – the word of God – to reason, the love of neighbor.

If we are transformed or metamorphosed, even if we should start to shine and our garments begin to glister, if we come to be changed by our encounters with the living God, we too must resist the temptation to merely preserve the awareness of power and glory and instead employ it for the work of healing one another. We must get out and start rebuking some demons ourselves. God knows there are plenty of them prowling around, terrorizing the innocent, preying upon the weak, destroying the planet, fomenting violence, spreading lies, killing the world.

The Transfiguration is a pivotal moment; the setting on the mountain is the point where human nature meets God: the meeting place for the temporal and the eternal, with Jesus himself as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth. This echoes the teaching by Jesus that God is not "the God of the dead, but of the living". Although Moses had died and Elijah had been taken up to heaven centuries before, they now live in the presence of the Son of God, implying that the same return to life can apply to all of us who face death and have faith. Today we are summoned to go to that elevated place of seclusion, suitable for divine self-disclosure, to follow Jesus and Peter, James and John and to experience again – as if for the first time – this most mysterious and dazzling of revelations.

The only thing we are asked to bring with us up the mountain is our imagination and a childlike opennesss to wonder. St. Augustine once asked himself what God was doing before creating heaven and earth. He decided that God was making hell for minds that pry. To climb the mountain, therefore, with prying minds hell-bent on debunking the mystical or disproving the miraculous is akin to killing something to see how it’s made. What occurred on the mountain surpasses institutional practices and intellectual categories. In the season of Epiphany, as H. K. Oehmig has so gracefully put it, “…the season of the showing forth of God in Christ, the begetting of the story developed into the beholding of it.” The beholding of it by the apostles here on Mount Tabor is the result, and by any of us with hearts to hear and souls to see. We have to put away our pins and boxes and simply watch the butterflies.

The unveiling is about to take place. Just as Joseph was revealed to his brothers in his miraculous rebirth of forgiveness and plenty, Jesus is shown forth for what God really is, the One who comes into our world that we might enter the sacred, eternal habitation ourselves. This inbreaking of the Holy, wherein the invisible becomes visible, led Thomas Aquinas to remark, “I have seen things that make all my writing seem like straw.”

In Mary Zimmerman’s play *Metamorphoses*, the Woman speaks of the consciousness she longs for: “Bodies, I have in mind, and how they can change to assume new shapes – I ask the help of the gods, who know the trick: change me, and let me glimpse the secret and speak, better than I know how, of the world’s birthing, and the creation of all things, from the very first to the very latest.”

She prays to be thrust into a new life. Paradoxically, it is a life at once more disciplined and more free. One becomes conscious of the vastness of creation and our relative insignificance on the one hand, and the complete and individualized freedom to love we have been given in our humanity on the other.

We have heard – perhaps we have said – the prayer: “Please answer me, God; why are you so silent.” Yet whenever we have seen love and humility in action and beauty and wonder in nature, and have given ourselves up to their power, we know our prayers are heard. Surrender to prevail. Or, as Gandhi was known to say, “God speaks to us every day; sometimes we listen.”

**Hymn 460** **Alleluia, sing to Jesus**

Alleluia! sing to Jesus! his the scepter, his the throne;   
Alleluia! his the triumph, his the victory alone;   
Hark! the songs of peaceful Zion thunder like a mighty flood;  
Jesus out of every nation hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! not as orphans are we left in sorrow now;   
Alleluia! he is near us, faith believes, nor questions how:   
Though the cloud from sight received him, When the forty days Were o'er, Shall our hearts forget his promise, "I am with you evermore"?

Alleluia! Bread of Heaven, thou on earth our food, our stay!  
Alleluia! here the sinful flee to thee from day to day:  
Intercessor, friend of sinners, earth's Redeemer, plead for me,  
Where the songs of all the sinless sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! sing to Jesus! his the scepter his the throne;  
Alleluia! his the triumph, his the victory alone;  
Hark! the songs of holy Zion thunder like a mighty flood;  
Jesus out of every nation hath redeemed us by his blood.

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKoQ7LGgDPs**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKoQ7LGgDPs)

**Contraband**

The tree of knowledge was the tree of reason.  
That’s why the taste of it  
drove us from Eden. That fruit  
was meant to be dried and milled to a fine powder  
for use a pinch at a time, a condiment.  
God had probably planned to tell us later  
about this new pleasure.

We stuffed our mouths full of it,  
gorged on *but* and *if* and *how* and again  
*but*, knowing no better.  
It’s toxic in large quantities, fumes  
swirled in our heads and around us  
to form a dense cloud that hardened to steel,  
a wall between us and God, Who was Paradise.

Not that God is unreasonable—but reason  
in such excess was tyranny  
and locked us into its own limits, a polished cell  
reflecting our own faces. God lives  
on the other side of that mirror,  
but through the slit where the barrier doesn’t  
quite touch ground, manages still  
to squeeze in—as filtered light,  
splinters of fire, a strain of music heard  
then lost, then heard again.

Denise Levertov