

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany, February 10, 2013. Nigel Taber-Hamilton
Gospel: the Transfiguration according to Luke.

I think this story about Jesus on the mountaintop both attracts and disturbs – even scares – us!

On the one hand we see in it a moment of glory, a transformational encounter, a thin place, and on the other hand we see in it a moment of glory, a transformational encounter, a thin place!

That vision both attracts and repels, invites and frightens.

On the one hand isn't this the sort of moment we long for? It isn't a "Stay tuned; all will be explained" moment, but an "all is being explained right here, right now" moment. Here with all the bells and whistles, all the bright lights and camera clicks, is the unequivocal statement that not only is there a God but we can find places of encounter, right here, right now with this God; that there ARE thin places, that our lives CAN be transformed, that faith IS real.

The flip side is, of course, the consequences of that realization. No longer – if we embrace the amazing truth being laid out before us on this day - no longer is one of our choices being able to say something like: "well, maybe there's a God, and perhaps I might meet God, so on the off-chance I'll hang I there with this "Christian thing" 'cos I kinda like the people, and the place is pretty neat"! We can't say that any more! The Transfiguration story – if we take it seriously – put's that perspective into the "nice try, but...." category!

Now I know Peter always seems to get a bad rap for wanting to stay in the moment. And he certainly does misunderstand some of what's happening. Jesus – and, later, Paul, will consistently say that we are "temples of the Holy Spirit" – that we are, in essence, the booths in which God will dwell, while Peter was thinking of the old ways and the Festival of Booths, which keeps God "out there", not "in here" – 'in a box' as it were!

But we should give the man some credit! Peter doesn't turn and run! He recognizes the holiness of the moment and he's joyful! Joyful! No fear here.

If there's fear, for Peter, it's recorded when the four of them – Jesus, Peter, James, and John, the Teacher and his core disciples – come off the mountain. In Mark Peter tries to intervene when Jesus starts talking about the very real-world consequences of challenging the status quo and the Powers, namely, crucifixion. You can almost hear Peter saying "Say it ain't so, Jesus". I think Jesus' response there – sudden, sharp anger – shows how much Jesus would like not to be facing those terrible consequences either. What he needed was disciples who backed him out, not he echoed his own doubts!

So where did Peter go wrong (if he did go wrong!)? Perhaps in failing to see the connection between the transformation that God can make in the core identity of every human being, and the consequences of that transformation in the nitty-gritty of daily living.

After all, if we come in here every Sunday, are moved through worship, love the music and

ritual, celebrate the fellowship, and then go home as if nothing's changed, how are we different than Peter?

Genuine faith changes lives – our own AND others.

I think that the glory and the fear – the flip sides of this moment – are not only very real in this story but also APPROPRIATELY very real in our response to it. Only a fool has no fear. The greatest heroes aren't heroes because they are fearless in their actions, but because they act in spite of their fear.

Lent is now only 3 days away. I invite you, in this self-reflective season, to consider the glory and the fear of God's transforming Spirit.

And, hopefully, to determine to act on the transformational encounters in spite of the consequences that will undoubtedly be a part of your response. AMEN.