

Lenten Meditations

2010
All Saints' Episcopal Church

March 1, 2010

"You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" What is it about us that could lead Jesus to make such an exasperated statement?

In this passage Luke tells us of Jesus' miraculous transfiguration before Peter, John and James. How humbling it must have been to have been able to bear witness to such a miracle. Yet instead of giving thanks and praise, Peter offers to build three dwellings. Why? In a moment of profound and absolute proof of both the existence of God and Jesus' connection to Him, why would Peter offer to build three huts? Perhaps Luke's statement that Peter made this offer "not knowing what he said" begins to answer this question.

When confronted with something I do not understand, fear often sets in. To regain a sense of control I grab for something familiar and hold on just long enough to get my feet back on solid ground. Peter's offer to build these dwellings may have been just such a crutch in the face of the fear he most certainly must have felt at that moment. In that same manner, when Luke tells us of the clamoring crowds yelling to Jesus "I beg you to look at my son," they too had great fear and were asking for His help to return their lives back to a familiar state.

What does this need to hold onto the familiar tell us about ourselves? Intellectually we may know change is good, but emotionally, to face fear we need to hold onto something solid and sure. The real question quickly becomes – what are we holding onto?

God tells Peter "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Where once Jesus stood planning his departure, where Peter was offering to build the dwellings and where clouds were gathering overhead, the moment God tells Peter to stop and just listen, everything disappears and Jesus was found standing alone with just them. The message seems clear: God sent his Son to live amongst us to show us the way to His will for us. If we clear out our self will and listen, we will find something truly worthy of holding onto.

When Jesus asks "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you" He may just be asking how long are we going to hold onto our self will and not trust Him enough to show us the way to God's will for us. His harsh words may be strong but so is His profound love for us and His pain in watching us cling to the crutches of our self will.

May we find a strong foothold in our faith and let go of self will.
May the greatness of God's will for us astound us all.

Ralph Engelberger

March 2, 2010

Transfer – Transform - Transfigure

Peter, James and John went up a mountain with Jesus as a community of faith to pray. As they sat upon the mountaintop, Jesus was transfigured before the disciples' very eyes. Moses and Elijah are there, the Law and the Prophets, the past knowledge and faith passed on to that very moment, passed on to Jesus and those with him. And in that passing their lives are transformed as the three disciples see Jesus' transfiguration and hear God's proclamation. Transfer of knowledge leads to the transformation of lives.

One of the key ways knowledge has been transferred is through books. I was looking through the books of the shelves in my office recently and specifically at what might best be described as the historical section, where the books from the more distant years of my life are tucked away for an occasional nostalgic glance.

Among the books from my childhood is one titled *Our Prayers and Praise*, copyrighted 1957. This hardback book contains both the office of Morning Prayer and The Holy Communion service from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. I remember using it as a child when I was beginning the journey of faith that continues for me until this very moment. This little volume was a means for transfer of knowledge and a means by which I was introduced to formal liturgy.

But it was not this book that transformed me into a Christian. It was those who gave me this book that affected the process of transformation. Sunday School teachers, my parents, the choirmasters of my childhood and youth, priests who taught me the Catechism, youth group leaders, mentors and professors during my adult life and now a myriad of fellow Christians all around the northern half of Georgia with whom I have worshiped, prayed, celebrated new life and grieved the end of the earthly life of faithful servants of the Risen Lord.

These words are on a now discolored and somewhat tattered piece of paper affixed to the foot of my monitor on my desk: "Transformation Rather Than Just Transfer Of Knowledge".

This small reminder calls me to remember the work that we are about as Christians. The knowledge we have is very important; it is the foundation of the faith we proclaim and live out in our words and in our lives. But if those words and actions are simply backed up by the transfer of knowledge rather than the transformation of our lives, we become "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." If we expect those around us to believe and embrace the knowledge we have been given, we must be willing to show forth the transformation not only with our lips, but in our lives.

Lent is a time for us to be transformed by prayer, fasting, and acts of repentance. Find a mountaintop and invite Jesus to be there with you, to transform you, then you too may help to transform the world.

The Rev'd Chuck Girardeau

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March 3, 2010

I don't often think of God getting frustrated, but in this passage, we see both God and Jesus exhibiting irritation and annoyance. When the sleepy disciples ask an incongruous question, God's booming voice chastises them to listen to Jesus. When a man in the crowd begs Jesus to cast an evil spirit out of his child, Jesus harshly responds, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" Oh my! That certainly doesn't sound like the benevolent Christ we know and love! On one level, I find it somewhat heartening that Jesus can lose his temper. It is a reflection and reminder that he was indeed human, with flaws and shortcomings just like us. As the mother of a spirited toddler, I know a thing or two about frustration and regularly find myself praying for patience. It is a comfort to know that even Jesus snapped once in a while.

The obvious lesson of this passage, however, is that Jesus' own humanity was superseded by his divinity. After angrily barking at the crowd, I can envision Jesus taking a deep breath (maybe counting to 10?) and then calmly healing the child. The passage does not focus on Jesus' reproach, but rather quickly moves on to Christ's benevolent act and the crowd's astonishment at the greatness of God. What a fantastic example of how we should be living our own lives. Even when we lose our temper, even if we're impatient or uncharitable, even when we fail momentarily at being a Christian, we **MUST** quickly move on and find that divinity within ourselves.

As we go through Lent, this is a lesson I will try to ingrain in myself. My family believes that instead of "giving up" something during Lent (something that we immediately go back to after Easter), we should use those forty days to work proactively on a shortcoming and attempt to make ourselves better Christians. This year during Lent, when I become irritated or annoyed, I will try harder to move on and let these ugly moments of humanity be superseded by God's grace and goodwill.

Emily Roselli

March 4, 2010

Near misses and the power of the transfiguration

After having been together for eight days, Jesus summoned Peter, John, and James to a kind of retreat. After all, they were the inner circle. The peak of Mt. Tabor was an isolated place where they could all be alone, get away, and pray quietly. As Jesus' clothes and body became dazzling white, the disciples witnessed what is known as the Transfiguration. The voice from the cloud issued a stern call, to listen to Jesus. Through the events surrounding the Transfiguration, they saw the power and glory of God.

How does God show us his power? Could it be through our own frailties or lack of power? How about the near misses in life?

Perhaps you have terminal cancer, the treatment works, and you are cancer free. You are in the ten percent of those who are able to continue a normal life.

Imagine that you are unemployed, weeks away from financial ruin; then, out of the blue, you get a job that you never expected.

There is the scary near miss in traffic. We have all been there. Your heart is pounding and, your mind races. What would have happened, had you been in the intersection, seconds before?

I am of the belief that God will never give you more than you can handle. You ponder life's near misses, asking yourself, what if God had not been there. How much worse would it have been, had he not been in the plan? There are so many instances, where God's simple grace saved you from a bad outcome.

God validated his only son in the Transfiguration. He revealed himself to the apostles in a real way--the same way he shows us grace in our lives.

Jowell Thome

March 5, 2010

In first reading this excerpt of scripture, I felt overwhelmed. What stood out most in my mind was verse 42, when Jesus comes down from a mountain after being transfigured. When a child is brought to Jesus, he laments at how much longer he will have to bear with a "faithless and perverse generation."

In this text I'm tempted to write the most obvious and apparent idea that comes to my mind which is this: we do not fully understand what the spirit has to offer. Even Jesus, an enlightened individual, knew that we could not understand the faith we lack. I try not to get too down on myself, however; even after being called perverse and faithless, the demon is cast out and everyone is astounded by God. The commentary in my mind seems to be saying, "Nobody's perfect."

What does this mean?

It is an overused cliché, and I've heard people tell me, "Nobody's perfect. It's OK if you fail every once in a while." I'm absolutely sure that their intended meaning is to share some empathy, or help someone "shake off" failure. When I apply this to my life, I want to feel humbled by a failure in order to put everything in perspective — not that this is a bad idea.

But let's be honest with ourselves; does this phrase really ever soothe us? Do we ever really think, "Yeah, you're right, I am just like everyone else, I'll just do better next time!" I rather like to think of him standing behind us with his eyebrows raised and saying sarcastically, "Come on, you can do it," like one would a reluctant child. Maybe Jesus is saying this because he knows we are more than a "faithless and perverse generation." In my mind, the wisdom in between the lines is not that we fail, but that we have the potential to succeed. Truly, I don't know if he muttered this under his breath, or if he shouted this thought to the masses, but when we look past the obvious "Nobody's perfect," the motivation is profound. When he says this, it gets under my skin! When I read of the disciples' failure, I bet the same gears clicked in their mind that did in mine; when they saw Jesus heal this child, their thoughts bluntly said, "I'm going to do better."

In realizing that we do know Jesus, we can realize that his truth, strength, will, and dedication is in us also. When we realize that he has the power, we can achieve more through him. We don't have to live our lives in a self-deprecating way, thinking, "Well, nobody's perfect, it's ok if I can't do this." Close your eyes instead, take a few deep breaths, set goals, and achieve them. When you fail, fail running at 100%, because when we fall flat on our face, Jesus is always behind us saying, "I don't have to tell you to get up because you know that you can do this."

John Tibbetts

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For me, this passage is filled with mystery, miracles and change.

Like Peter, I often want to "build huts" to capture special moments. I think it is human nature to want to grab on to the good times and, believe me I have tried to hang on to many people, places and things. I have finally come to the conclusion that hanging on just doesn't work. God is changing all of creation and all of us all the time so for me to resist change, is me resisting God.

I have had to look for new ways to cherish what has been and yet still move on to what is to become. I call this my "in between space." I have found that it is in those "in between" spaces that I am most likely to see the gracefulness of God. To me this is when I am transformed—being freed to change my outlook and perspective, to see the world through new eyes, to empty myself out so that the new can have a place to perch.

It is not until I get to the "in between" space that I can experience the graciousness of God showing me the way—to be open where I have been closed, to be accepting when I have been judgmental, to see light where I have been in darkness, to experience fun instead of fear. I am still learning to recognize the "in between" spaces so I can intentionally seek the quiet place where I accept God's guidance—so I am able to see, to hear, to make positive choices and, most important, to be transformed.

What huts do you want to build?

What happens when you find yourself in the "in between" space?

When and how are you being transformed through the Grace of God?

Mary Marvin Walter