

This whole transfiguration story is odd to our modern day ears. We, unlike the original hearers of this tale, don't have incorporated into ourselves the story of Moses to the extent that we would make an automatic connection with the parallel symbols of both accounts. However, you might remember from just a few weeks ago the story of Jesus' baptism and hear those same words echoed through this story, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased..." "Listen to him" is added to the Transfiguration story.

Transfiguration is a strange word. Transfigured itself is a strange verb, very seldom used in Scripture and in our own vocabulary. "He was transfigured." Its roots in Greek are tied to metamorphosis, pointing us to an image of total transformation. *Hear* again and imagine the transformation that takes place on that mountain – Jesus' face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." (If you're looking for an image, the Transfiguration window is right over there.) Our response to Biblical images such as these is often something like, "I wonder what *really* happened," when actually the appropriate response here might simply be, "WOW!"

Peter, James, and John see Jesus, with his face shining like the sun, speaking to Moses and Elijah when suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. The only other time this verb appears in the Gospels is when Gabriel is announcing to Mary that she will have a son. (Pointing to the Annunciation window) "How can it be? Me?" she asks. Gabriel tells Mary, "The power of the Most High will *overshadow* you" (Luke 1.35).

A bright cloud *overshadowed* them on the mountain, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome with fear. (Matthew 17:5-6) Perhaps theirs is a more appropriate response, falling to the ground, overcome with fear or awe at the magnitude of that which presents itself before us. The Transfiguration and the Resurrection are the bookends of this season of Lent that lies ahead us, and in the presence of such magnitude perhaps it would do us good during this season to move from an analytical posture to one of awe and wonder as we take in what God is doing in our lives and in the world.

There are sacred spaces, places of holy encounter in our lives. When we look at the whole of our living we might say at such times we are enveloped by a bright cloud. Sometimes we might actually hear a voice "from the cloud," and other times we experience a heightened awareness of God's presence with us. These moments, because for most of they are moments, are sometimes referred to as liminal spaces, or *thin* places where the connection between God's reality and ours is easier to perceive.

Take your own birth for example. Despite any burdens we inherited, I hope that most of us can identify gifts that came along with the place in life into which we were born. Love from our parents, in the best way they knew how to give it. Communities into which we were born that have also loved us and nurtured us into the people we are today. Opportunities that have arisen because of the time, place and family into which we were born. None of these things are of our own deserving. We had nothing to do with our own place of birth, yet the gifts of grace and love have been freely given to us. AWE!

I think of my own life of faith, and the people who have ultimately shaped my beliefs, many of whom I don't even know, nor did they know me. I know my parents and my grandparents were active in the church, but I'm sure they didn't come of their faith on their own. There are generations of faithful before them that shaped them into their believing that ultimately still shape me today. These faces I don't even know reflect the light of Jesus' face shining like the sun in my life, and for that I should fall to the ground in AWE!

Then there are the faces I do know. My grandmother, Evelyn Sherrer Henry, whom we called GaGa, even years after her death continues to shape my faith today. When I was a teenager she gave me a ring with a cross on it that I used to wear on the ring finger of my right hand. My friends back then noticed how I often spun that ring with my thumb and used to rub it when I was thinking. I later realized that unconsciously it was a thin place, a place of connection with the faith and the love that my grandmother had given to me, a faith and a love that reflected Christ's light to me. Even though she is now gone and I no longer wear that ring, I still find myself using this place as a touchstone.

George Yandell is an Episcopal priest. When I was 21, he was chosen for me by someone else as a mentor in a leadership program I was involved in at Rhodes College. He welcomed me into his life, and we became friends. An official part of our interaction was to explore leadership styles and to observe each other in our leadership roles, and we did that. But we also shared meals, he invited me to his family table, we road bikes together and he taught me how to change the oil in my car. That relationship was chosen for me. I had nothing to do with its inception. Yet George introduced me to a way of living faith that was both deep and wide, and our friendship still shapes me today.

María was born in Bolivia. María is also the name of the mother of Christ. This Bolivian María found herself living on the streets of Buenos Aires when I was working there in the 1990's. There was no room in the inn for her, and she used to come in to our comedor and have lunch with us and the other men and women who were homeless and looking for a meal, a safe place and people who treated them with dignity and respect. You couldn't help but treat María that way. She was a small woman, a little bent over, who always carried all that she owned wrapped in a bundle thrown over her shoulder. Theoretically I was the one who was supposed to take care of her, yet she was the one who cared for me. She would greet me with a smile, a warmth in her eyes and a strong embrace, and was always genuinely more interested in how I was doing than in discussing her own predicament. I often sensed light shining from María's face.

Who are those people in your lives? Those that reveal God's presence to you? Those people who have reflected Christ's light to you? Those who reach out and touch you, pick you up when you fall and say, "Do not be afraid."

I can't help but think of this congregation. The people who have come before us in this place that we don't even know. The very faces that have occupied the same pews you sit in today. Those that built this place and have carried the faith here so that we too can know God in our lives.

And then there are the faces that we do know. Those that greet us with warmth and welcome when we walk through these doors, regardless of whether we "deserve" it or not. Some of my heroes are the 70, 80 and 90 year old women, who have lived much of their lives within the fold of this congregation, who greet us with openness and the strength of their embrace, like that of a hug from my own six year old son, who shows me unconditional love, regardless of the kind of day I'm having.

This is a church who by all standards of rational analysis shouldn't be here today. Many thought the doors would have been closed long ago. Yet here we are, overflowing with children, with a renewed vigor, on another Transfiguration Sunday worshipping God together. We are illumined by our past with a light that brightens our present and shines into our future. Our future is in God's hands, and surely Christ's face shines there like the sun.

Thanks be to God. Amen.