

A Liturgy for Transfiguration

Opening Sentences

Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”
—John 8:58

Psalm

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? *
The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?
When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, *
they stumbled and fell.
Though a host were encamped against me, yet my heart would not be afraid, *
and though war rose up against me, yet would I put my trust in him.
One thing have I desired of the LORD; one thing I seek: *
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the fair beauty of the LORD, *
and to seek him in his temple.
For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his tabernacle; *
indeed, in the secret place of his dwelling he shall hide me, and set me high upon a rock of
stone...
I would utterly have fainted, *
had I not believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
O wait for the Lord; be strong, and he shall comfort your heart. *
O put your trust in the Lord.

—Psalm 27:1-6, 16-17, New Coverdale

Poem

Transfiguration

For that one moment, ‘in and out of time’,
On that one mountain where all moments meet,
The daily veil that covers the sublime
In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.
There were no angels full of eyes and wings
Just living glory full of truth and grace.
The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leaped up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope
Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.
Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.

—Malcolm Guite

The Readings

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

—2 Corinthians 4:5-6, ESV

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.

As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

—Luke 9:28-36, ESV

Reflections

It had always seemed to Emily, ever since she could remember, that she was very, very near to a world of wonderful beauty. Between it and herself hung only a thin curtain; she could never draw the curtain aside—but sometimes, just for a moment, a wind fluttered it and then it was as if she caught a glimpse of the enchanting realm beyond—only a glimpse—and heard a note of unearthly music.

This moment came rarely—went swiftly, leaving her breathless with the inexpressible delight of it. She could never recall it—never summon it—never pretend it; but the wonder of it stayed with her for days. It never came twice with the same thing. Tonight the dark boughs against that far-off sky had given it. It had come with a high, wild note of wind in the night, with a shadow-wave over a ripe field, with a greybird lighting on her window-sill in a storm, with the singing of "Holy, holy, holy," in church, with a glimpse of the kitchen fire when she had come home on a dark autumn night, with the spirit-like bleu of ice palms on a twilit pane, with a felicitous new word when she was writing down a 'description' of something.

And always when the flash came to her Emily felt that life was a wonderful, mysterious thing of persistent beauty.

—L. M. Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*

When mystery confronts us, drawing us up short, it is often when we least expect it. I imagine that when Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on Mount Tabor to pray, the disciples are not expecting

to glimpse the mystery of the Incarnation. How many times had these disciples prayed with Jesus in the months or years they followed him? Dozens? Hundreds? And never before had the appearance of his face changed and his clothes become dazzling white. Never before had Moses and Elijah appeared with him in glory.

So it is hardly surprising that Peter, James, and John are half-asleep as Jesus prays through the night. Only when they fully awaken do they come face to face with mystery: they see Jesus in his glory, a glory that is his from before time, but which has been veiled from their sight until this moment when they finally see him as he truly is.

As Moses and Elijah are about to leave, Peter bursts out in his impetuous way, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He wants this moment to last, I think, but he also, instinctively, wants to contain their glory. And no wonder—perhaps he knows that we mortals can only bear so much reality before it overwhelms our senses. Perhaps this is why the disciples are terrified as they enter the cloud. They know that the cloud signals the presence of God, and they know that no one can look on God and live. It is not simply because we are sinful and God is holy. No, it is because God is Real, and our finite minds cannot comprehend nor our frail bodies bear the eternity and majesty—the utter real-ness—of God....

In our finitude and weakness, we cannot bear to look on ultimate reality any more than we can bear to look directly at the sun. And so reality is veiled, hidden from view—at least most of the time. But every so often, we, like Emily and the disciples, glimpse the enchanted realm beyond the veil. We see, for a fleeting moment, the glory of God made manifest among us.

—K. C. Ireton, *The Circle of Seasons*

Closing Prayer

O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant 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 in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

—Book of Common Prayer

Benediction

On this feast of Transfiguration and in the days to come, may your eyes be opened to the beauty and goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. May these earthly beauties open you to glimpses of the glory beyond the veil of mortal sight. And may the Lord comfort your heart and increase your faith that He is always and everywhere with you and for you. **Amen.**

Resources:

“Transfiguration” by Malcolm Guite is from [Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Church Year](#).
[Emily of New Moon](#) by L. M. Montgomery ~ [The Circle of Seasons](#) by K. C. Ireton ~ [The Book of Common Prayer](#)

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