

WPC
Rev. Ken Sunoo
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Reaffirmation of Baptism – Mira & Ellie Garman

The Reflection of Glory
Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9

So the Pope allegedly was flying from Rome to New York for a very important meeting with the Secretary General of the United Nations. Preparations for the meeting had begun months earlier, and the Pope eagerly anticipated his part in this historic meeting.

As the plane approached John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City, it was unexpectedly diverted to Newark Airport in New Jersey. Then because of unsafe wind conditions, the aircraft was forced into a holding pattern, which further delayed the arrival for more than an hour. When the plane finally touched down at Newark, the Pope was quickly whisked away in a limousine to his conference with the Secretary General at the U.N. building in Midtown Manhattan.

With the meeting scheduled to begin within a few minutes, the Pope sat anxiously in the back seat of the limousine. He then gently asked the chauffeur, "Can you drive a bit faster, my son? I have a meeting with the

Secretary General of the United Nations. There are more than 200 dignitaries awaiting my arrival. The outcome of this meeting could have a dramatic effect on world events. I must not be late."

The limousine driver begged, "I'm terribly sorry, Your Holiness, but I can't afford another speeding ticket. I have already been warned that if I receive one more ticket I will lose my license. Surely you understand. I have a wife and three children to support. I'm really terribly sorry."

The Pope was sympathetic to the worried driver. However, he desperately needed to travel faster. He asked the chauffeur to stop the car. The Pope then got out of the limousine, told the chauffeur to get in the back, and then stepped in behind the wheel himself as he sped off toward his appointment.

The Pope drove aggressively and rapidly wove in and out of traffic. His driving caught the attention of several motorists, none more important than two New York City police officers. The officers promptly chased the vehicle and signaled it to pull over.

A notoriously tough officer announced to his partner, "Let me handle this one. These big shots think they can order their chauffeurs to speed

around my city in their big limousines. Well, this one's not going to get away with it. I'll see to that. Before I'm through, this guy will have at least five tickets to pay! It'll be the sorriest day of his life."

His partner remained in the patrol car and watched. Within a minute, the hard-nosed cop returned and was visibly shaken. His ticket book was still unopened. His partner inquired, "You didn't write him a single ticket? What happened?"

The first officer said sheepishly, "I couldn't write him a ticket. This guy is important. I mean really important."

His partner asked, "Who was it? The Mayor of New York City?"

The first officer responded, "No, bigger than that."

His partner then asked, "Well, was it the Governor of New York State?"

He replied, "No, bigger than that."

His partner cried out, "Don't tell me you pulled over the President of the United States?"

The shaken cop insisted, "No, he's even bigger than that!"

His partner retorted, "Bigger than the President of the United States? Who in the world is bigger than the President of The United States?"

The first officer answered, "Well, I'm not exactly sure, but the Pope is his chauffeur!"¹

Today's text on the transfiguration tells us what a big figure Jesus truly is. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets. Peter, James, and John might have wondered who was bigger than Moses and Elijah, two towering figures in Jewish history. God lets them know it was Jesus, his beloved Son.

The story of the transfiguration appears in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which tells us it made a profound impact on the disciples who were present. The incident is introduced by a significant time reference, "Six days later..." Why six days? Many think there's a connection with Moses and the mountain – our Old Testament reading from Exodus 24:16 states: "The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it *for six days*; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud."

¹Gregory L. Tolle, From the book *Lectionary Tales For the Pulpit*, Series IV, Cycle A, <http://www.sermonsuite.com/content.php?i=26307&key=eUolwwshkiAg36fw>

While on the mountain, Jesus was transfigured (literally the word used is *metamorphosis*) before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. In Exodus, Moses had a shining face after his encounter with God. God’s glory reflected off Moses’ face so much he had to wear a veil to cover it. Here, the disciples see someone they thought they knew fairly well “suddenly revealed in a completely new light.”² Literally, the disciples see Jesus in a different light! They see Jesus as he truly, objectively is – God’s beloved Son. This is a Christophany – a manifestation of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah.

When Peter offers to build three dwellings, *suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”* God’s voice from the cloud echoes the words at Jesus’ baptism, but a new word is added: “Listen to him.” “Listen” is a present imperative, implying continual or repeated actions: “Keep on listening to him” or “Continue to listen to him.”

Even by biblical standards, the story of the transfiguration is an unusual story. It’s a story about a **vision**. We need to be alert to the kind of vision it is: the language used is that of apocalyptic literature. As Tom Long

² Douglas John Hall, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 1, p. 452.

states, “one major purpose of apocalyptic literature is to pull back the curtain, to lift the veil, so that what is normally hidden can be seen” (Long, 192).

Since God’s activity is often hidden from normal human sight, apocalyptic texts reveal to us, if only for an instant, “the incognito activity of God.” So, “when Jesus’ face begins to shine and his clothes become luminous, it’s not because of some mutation in him; it’s a disclosure of what is already true about him – a sign of his glory, an apocalyptic way of saying, ‘Look! This Jesus of splendor is who he really is’” (Long, p. 193).

The transfiguration helps us to see both the divine and human sides of Jesus. “On one hand, the transfiguration affirms Jesus’ divinity; on the other, it begins to give the disciples eyes to see God’s light in the chaos to come: death, loss, fear and resurrection, the work of the early church. The challenge to the disciples is to live in a world without Jesus’ bodily presence. The transfiguration anticipates this challenge, inviting us to live in ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:6). As that light shines in our hearts, the incarnate God is made real in the every day.”³

³ Maryetta Madeleine Anschutz, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 1, p. 454.

In C.S. Lewis' book *The Silver Chair*, the great golden lion Aslan speak these words to Jill: "Here on this mountain I have spoken to you clearly. I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain, the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearance. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters."⁴

"God prepares people in the transcendent encounters of our lives to endure the world below, the world of the cross, the world that has the ability to break us and yet is never beyond God's redemption."⁵

The account of Jesus' transformation can move us towards transformation ourselves -- not that we are to literally shine like Jesus, but that we are to be transformed in our thinking about Jesus, about his mission and our mission to the world. Our lives should reflect God's glory and love to those around us. As we approach the season of Lent, may God help us to be faithful to this calling. Amen.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, p. 21.

⁵ Anschutz, p. 454.