

A Transfiguration Class by Professor Luke New Testament University

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Luke 9:

[28] Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

[29] And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white.

[30] And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah,

[31] who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.

[32] Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they wakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

[33] And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah" -- not knowing what he said. [34] As he said this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

[35] And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

[36] And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silence and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

I finally got acquainted with the Harry Potter books one Christmas, when we gave our grandson a set of them. If you've read them, you know they're full of tales of transfiguration. The characters turn into rats and spiders and all kinds of other things. Now, the only transfiguration story I remember from my childhood is the fairy tale of Cinderella, who has to be home before midnight so her coach doesn't turn into a pumpkin.

But thanks to the Harry Potter books, we now have the wizard Professor Dumbledore and his advanced classes in transfiguration. I obviously haven't studied under Professor Dumbledore. Reality remains more alluring to me than fiction.

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But, I have been able to study under the New Testament's Professors and I can report they do also offer courses in transfiguration. All these courses, in fact, are focused on two transfigurations - Jesus' and, you guessed it - yours and mine.

The professor we're learning from today is Luke. You might just want to make some notes. Don't worry if you don't have anything to write on. Write your notes on your heart.

Professor Luke tells us that while Jesus was praying on a mountain top with Peter and James and John, his appearance was altered and his clothing became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and spoke of Jesus' departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

As to the specifics of the transfiguration Jesus undergoes and we are called to undergo, one of Professor Luke's students, the Episcopal priest Jane Butterfield, goes at it this way: "Nothing has changed and everything is changing. We still live in a suffering world and God is still transforming the world by means of divine love. The mission of God continues. To the extent that we draw near in faith to receive and respond to this love and join God in mission, we are transformed and God's transforming mission continues through us." Rev. Jane Butterfield http://www.episcopalchurch.org/6087_27584_ENG_HTM.htm

Yet a critical aspect in doing this involves what I call transfiguration discipleship. And at the center of transfiguration discipleship is how to deal with suffering, both our own and that of others. Jesus dealt with it by going through it and in so doing he was eternally transfigured from death to Life. We will likewise be transfigured. But, the problem is going through the suffering now.

Stories from Professor Luke's Transfiguration Class students are everywhere. In her book *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, Rachel Naomi Remen tells a story that may help us as we struggle with suffering:

"The young man was angry. ... He had been a high school and college athlete. ... And then came the diagnosis. He developed a tumor on his right leg. The only treatment was to remove the leg above the knee. Playing ball was a thing of the past.

"He refused to return to school. He began to drink heavily, and engage in other self-destructive behaviors. He alienated his former admirers and friends, and began to have one accident after another. After the second of these accidents, his former coach set up a visit with a counselor.

"He came in, filled with a sense of injustice and self-pity. The pain in him was so deep; it was difficult to express it all in words. The counselor gave him a drawing pad and asked him to draw a picture of his body. He drew a crude sketch of a vase, just an outline. And then, running through the center of it he drew a deep crack. He went over and over the crack with a black crayon, gritting his teeth and ripping the

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paper with the pressure. He had tears in his eyes, and they were tears of rage. The counselor folded the picture and put it away.

“But his anger began to change. One day he brought in a newspaper article to share with his counselor. It was about a young man who had lost a leg in a motorcycle accident. The man's doctors were quoted at length. ‘Those idiots don't understand the first thing about it,’ he said furiously. . . . Underneath his rage seemed to also be a concern about others with injuries. Did he want to do anything about it, the counselor asked.

“The young man began to visit with patients in the hospital who had injuries or problems similar to his own. He came back from these visits, delighted that he was able to reach young people. After awhile he was able to speak to parents and families, helping them to understand better what was needed. The surgeons began to refer their patients to him, and a mutual respect began to grow. The anger transformed itself into a kind of ministry with others.

“One day he visited with a young woman. At age 21 she had also undergone serious surgery for cancer and her body would never be the same. . . . she lay in the bed with her eyes closed, refusing to look at him or engage him, depressed and angry. . . . In the background a radio was playing rock music. Frustrated, he finally stood up, unstrapped the harness of his artificial leg, and let it drop to the floor with a loud bang. Startled, she opened her eyes. Encouraged, he began to hop around the room, snapping his fingers in time to the music and laughing. After a moment, she burst out laughing too. “Fella,” she said, “If you can dance, maybe I can sing.”

“This young woman became his friend, and eventually became his wife. . . . If his life, if her life had never taken the turns they did, chances are they would never have found each other.

“At [the young man's last session], the counselor took out the picture of the broken vase that he had drawn - a drawing that represented his own body. He took it in his hands, and looked at it for some time. Then he said, ‘You know, it's really not finished.’ He took a yellow crayon from the basket and began to draw lines radiating from the crack in the vase. He extended the thick yellow lines even to the edge of the paper. He was smiling. Finally, he put his finger on the crack, and said softly, ‘This is where the light comes through.’ (Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, 114-118)

Our transfiguration class with Professor Luke this morning is over now, but there is a transfiguration homework assignment: make the words of “Shine, Jesus, Shine” your prayer today and always – it’s our hymn now, in *the ELW*, No. 671:

**Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me**

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Refrain

*Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light*

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me¹

Refrain

AMEN

¹ *Graham Kendrick
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