

Transfiguration 7 Feb 2016

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36

[Transfiguration / Last Epiphany C February 7, 2016](#) Textweek

The 'transfiguration' celebrated today provides us with an orientation for Lent, for before we start our journey through the wilderness we are given this gospel story of metamorphosis, transformation and change, a story of mystical encounter.

Before we look at today's readings and unwrap the story let's just take a step back into Christmas and consider a couple of questions; Why did Santa ride a sleigh through the sky, and why did Santa deliver presents down the chimney?

These and other such very rational questions can lead us into a debate about the benefits of heavy duty haulage, road transport in general and comparative fuel costs of reindeer versus other forms of transport. And we would need to be quite creative to explain the rational of using the chimney instead of the front door as the delivery point.

Of course we don't get into these sorts of questions because very early on we consign the whole story into disbelief; however the story of Santa and other stories of disbelief, or fiction, have the capacity to take us beyond the blinkers of our limited rational thought processes; and there is a genre of literature that names these narratives.

Magical realism is a genre of **literature** that blends **realistic** elements with **magical** elements to create '**magical realism**.' **Magical realism** originated in Latin America, where **writers** such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende made it popular.

The story of Santa is an amazingly simple (almost Disney-like) expression of some of life's deepest realities;

1. 'Giving' is the activity of God' it is from above; hence the sleigh in the sky.
2. 'Giving' transcends the boundaries of fear; it breaks through our homeland security, hence the chimney.
3. 'Giving' is not limited by what we can carry, so Santa has no need for heavy haulage transport.

Today's transfiguration stories are also provided to engage us 'beyond the obvious', they invite us to approach with imagination, as if we were looking for meaning in an abstract work of art; they seek to reveal those realities that we just cannot see, and yet will know as true when we come upon them.

And we're looking at two different 'transfiguration, narratives one from Exodus and one from Luke's gospel.

Luke's gospel account is helpful, for it is a reframing, or retelling of the Exodus narrative; it is an unfamiliar telling of a well-known and familiar story that is an important part of the 'understanding' of the Hebrew people.

There is enough similarity in the two narratives for us to appreciate the sameness of the stories, however it is in the differences that we can more fully appreciate the movement from the first to the second story; for the gospel account illuminates the enlightened realisation that Jesus has revealed. The gospel 'transfiguration' opens a completely different worldview, and a different understanding; and for those familiar with the traditional Exodus account, and satisfied with the centrality of Moses as the iconic prophet of divine truth, Luke's new version would have been quite challenging.

Both stories identify an understanding of God, and both have social and cultural implications; and in the stories we can see the different teaching of the authors and we can maybe also glimpse beyond what even they sought to teach.

Luke's understanding takes us beyond the simplicity of Moses and of God's word spelled out on tablets of stone, and the differences in the narrative illuminate the evolution of a much richer understanding of humanity and of God.

Moses goes up the mountain on his own; however Jesus goes with a trinity of humanity; what Luke shows us is that the glory of God is a communal reality, rather than a personal gift.

The light of Divine Glory is found when we are 'together in one place', an understanding repeated in the narrative of Pentecost...

The appearance of Moses and Elijah in the gospel account is another evolution, for it brings the past into the present, it brings the dead to life, Peter James and John are now mirrored by those who live a divine life, a life beyond the confines of death and Moses, Elijah speak with Jesus about that very same life, a dying and rising that will be accomplished in the Easter narrative.

Peter James and John, the three faces of humanity, see the glory of this Divine trinity; and they want to stay with that glory, they want to build dwellings to contain the light; unlike the Exodus narrative: "*When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.*"

In Luke's telling there is no veil to hide the light of glory, there is no fear of the light of Divine glory, and nor are there words of law carved into stone.

Peter, James and John are however terrified, when the light is overshadowed by the cloud; a contrast we all know and that is very much the experience of Lent.

We too are fine in the light, but terrified when the clouds of this world engulf us.

However, Luke would have known that his audience would have known that God is to be found in the cloud, earlier in the Exodus narrative we are told; "⁵*The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The Lord."*

Both narratives are stories of encounters with God, and both tell of being changed by such an encounter; the more simple Exodus narrative finishes with a list of dos and don'ts, and perhaps that was all that was required for a simple and primitive people.

Luke rekindles for us the voice heard at the baptism of Jesus "*Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"*"; there is no simple list of commandments to follow, rather a 'listening' a call to hear that we are baptised into a new worldview, and into a life of Christ-likeness.

On coming down from the mountain, Jesus heals a father's only Son; he gives new life to a father's only child; and so for us as we seek to find ourselves in the wilderness of Lent, we are given an orientation to be givers of life and in our giving of life, so too to realise the very gift of life.

These narratives are important for us in the everyday; they are not about climbing mountains to find God, for we hear that they "*went up on the mountain to pray*" and that too is where we will find the encounter of transfiguration.

They speak of coming down from the mountain, and in Luke's more enlightened telling, we see that our prayer life is the catalyst for the giving of ourselves into giving life to others.

And perhaps incidentally, both authors have placed God in a descending cloud; and the sooner we can own an understanding of God that is not Santa in the sky, the sooner we overcome the fundamentalism that knows only the primitive fear of glory in the first narrative..

May lent be a time when we each, and all find ourselves with Peter, James and John; and a time that prepares us for coming down to make real the mystery of Easter.