

## SO MUCH CAN HAPPEN IN A WEEK

In our church's calendar, the Sunday before Lent is always designated as Transfiguration Sunday. Annually, we travel with our Lord, with his disciples and our fellow apostles up a mountain to witness appearances of our faithful ancestors -- Moses and Elijah -- and to witness the transfiguration of our Lord.

The question is: whose transfiguration is it? Yes, Jesus gets transfigured. But Peter, James, John, and thanx to Matthew's description of these witnesses' account, each and every one of us...our lives can also be transformed if we try to understand the implication for our lives with the events of our Lord's.

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Our Gospel begins with the words "Six days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ...". In the "real time" of our Lord's and apostles experience, here is what Matthew describes in his 16th chapter, that occurred less than a week before today's transfiguration:

### **Matthew 16:13-20**

**16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"**

**16:14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."**

**16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"**

**16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."**

**16:17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.**

**16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.**

**16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."**

**16:20 Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.**

These two passages -- Matthew 16 & 17 -- are extraordinarily linked. First, Jesus asks and hears that people are comparing him to the great prophets, specifically Elijah. In today's Gospel, Elijah appears in flesh and blood to these chosen apostles.

Secondly, God proclaims from the heavens in the Gospel we just heard, “that this is God’s own beloved son, with whom He is pleased and we are to listen to Him.” Peter, just six days before, was praised by Jesus for understanding this truth without it having been revealed by humans but by having it been revealed, and then he interpreted and understood it wisely, from God Himself. **“For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”**

Thirdly, at the end of both passages in chapters 16 and 17, the apostles are told not to tell anyone He was the Messiah. What he should have added is “not yet”. For the very last chapter of Matthew has the Great Commission telling all of the believers to “Go out into all the world, baptizing and preaching and proclaiming the Christ to the ends of the earth. But as the apostles stand here, and we stand with them, at the cusp of our holiest season where we experience the death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord, we are given wonderly, powerful images and glimpses of the truth, but we don’t yet have the “complete” picture.

A little over six weeks ago we gathered here and witnessed the account of God coming into the world through a little babe in Bethlehem. Your extraordinary creche was placed before this altar, and you could gaze upon a human face that held, and holds, the hope of the world in his tiny arms.

A little more than six weeks from now, we will gather here and witness the account of God coming into the world through that same person, a babe grown into a 33 year old man, whose human face you could gaze on as he hangs on a cross, holds the hope of his world in his outstretched arms, and gives you and me and all who believe, the gift of eternal life.

Today we stand on a mountaintop with our Lord...one way looking back at his birth, life and instruction just concluded over the last six weeks or so in passages we entitle the “sermon on the mount”. Today we can stand on this mountaintop and look forward to his death, resurrection and ascension as he climbs that hill called Calvary alone but gives us all eternal life.

And it is TODAY that Moses, that giver of the law who, around 1300 B.C. met with God on top of Mount Sinai at about 7,200 feet -- almost exactly the height of our visible snow-covered mountains to the north and East -- when we gaze upon those frosted hills, we can remember the ten Commandments sent down to a God’s people like manna that frosted the ground and fed God’s people through the 40 years of wilderness. Peter, James and John witness Moses again on top of a different mountain...biblical scholars argue between 3 possible sites of today’s extraordinary events, even though the church of the transfiguration was built on a nearby mountain of Jerusalem...so if they can argue about which one was the site of transfiguration, we can imagine our snow capped, appropriately named after the angel San Gabriel’s, as inspiration for God’s holy law.

Our lives, like the lives of the apostles, can be transformed by acknowledging and beginning to understand that the man chosen by God to receive those holiest of laws, the 10 commandments, and chosen by God to lead his people through the wilderness to the edge of the Promised Land, stood on a mountaintop with our Lord, Elijah and the apostles. The writer attributed to composing the Torah, our first 5 books of the Old Testament, stands with Jesus while God proclaims Jesus as the Son, the Messiah, the Christ to whom they...and we... have all been waiting.

And it is TODAY that Elijah, the 800 B.C. holy man who is deemed in our Biblical history as greatest of the prophets, stands with Moses and Jesus and Peter, James and John, and acknowledges that the ONE, Holy Almighty God as Elijah brought a warring and sinful world back to the ONE true creator juxtaposed against all the multiple God's of Baal, He stands on top of that mountain while that same one true God proclaims who is the one, true Savior.

And so it is TODAY that the apostles witness time and space and eternity all coming together in one momentous moment....and they fall on their faces. Literally. They do not know how to respond and the first human reaction, as told to us time and time again when faced with the momentous occasions of the birth of our savior, the shepherds had to be told to not be afraid; the momentous occasion of the resurrection of our Lord at the tomb, the women had to be told to not be afraid.

So why should today be any different? Those oh so human apostles, witnessing Moses, Elijah, the Messiah and God's bright light and all encompassing voice, I think I would fall on my face too. But our Lord tells us to "Get up and don't be afraid." And when they do look up again, Jesus, alone is waiting for them. Jesus will lead them down that mountain. And Jesus will never leave them as they must keep the secret of all secrets for just a little while longer, until all of the remarkable events of our Lord's Passion...from Palm Sunday through the Last Super, the events of the Garden in Gethemene, Pilate's court and judgment, the walk with the life-altering cross, up another small hill...that must have felt like a mountain to our Lord under the weight of the cross, up Calvary...and then the burial in a cave where it will become famous for not what is found inside but what is NOT found inside on that blessed Easter morning...to seeing our Lord again through the locked walls of the Upper Room, telling us to not be afraid, giving us the peace of life that passes all understanding, and walking with us as we go out to all the corners of the world to finally tell a hungry, hurting world that the Lord lives....and so do we. We have been set free by a God who stands with us on mountaintops and in the valleys of our lives. Our lives can be transformed by witnessing the transfiguration of our Lord.

Only a week has passed since Peter's acknowledgement of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah who has come to save us all. So much can happen in a week's time.

Our Holiest of weeks is approaching as we begin our Lenten journey this week on Ash Wednesday. There is so much that can happen in a week.

Jesus transfigured the world with his presence, death and resurrection. How do we transfigure the world in which we live by acknowledging his presence, telling people about a living God who dies and gives us eternal life forever?

There is so much that can happen in a week. How has Jesus transfigured himself in your life this week? How and when have you witnessed Him? Or maybe more importantly, how will Jesus transfigure himself in your life this week? How and when will you witness Him? So much can happen in a week...

The Rev. Lisa Rotchford Golden, 3/6/11, St. Andrew's Fullerton, CA