

Today is the Feast of the Transfiguration, an event which is described in each of the synoptic Gospels but not in John. Were this service a Eucharist, we would have had the Gospel reading from Luke that describes Jesus going up a mountain to pray with Peter, James, and John. In prayer, Jesus is transfigured and his clothes become a dazzling white. Both Moses and Elijah appeared to them. Moses, of course, led the children of Israel to the promised land; and throughout much of Hebrew Scripture, Elijah who had been bodily assumed into heaven was forecast to return as the portent of the coming of the Messiah. A cloud descends on them and God says to them from the cloud, *This is my Son, my chosen, listen to him.*

You will recall that for the last two sessions of Evening Prayer, a recurring theme has been the disciples' struggle to understand who Jesus really is. The Transfiguration is an event of decisive revelation, but note it is only for Peter, James, and John, and note that they were terrified. Luke tells us *...they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.* The mystery continued to unravel slowly – an ever gradual understanding among the disciples that, if ever, would not be complete until at least the Ascension.

Before we think of why the Transfiguration story does not appear in John, and we think of our Johannine reading, let us take a moment to think of our reading from Daniel. Daniel was a noble youth from Jerusalem who was taken into captivity in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BCE. He served the king until Babylon was conquered by Cyrus the Great of Persia in 539. Now a great age, Daniel continued to serve Cyrus as he had the Babylonian kings. He was renowned despite his service to alien kings for his faithfulness to the Hebrew faith. Our passage this evening comes just after he is a victim of a conspiracy and placed in the lion's den. He survived: *My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me because I was found blameless before him....* This evening's passage comes in a vision Daniel had of the Ancient One seated upon a throne: *I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.* This passage is a vision clearly foretelling the events of the Transfiguration. Bear in mind this passage was written at least a century or two before Jesus.

So why is the Transfiguration missing from John's Gospel? Do not forget that John was writing for a largely Gentile audience into the second century of the common era. The community of believers had survived many tribulations even as more were continuing to assail them. But they were clear on who they thought Jesus was. As the church continued to expand among the Gentiles, they were clear that Jesus was the son of God. So the affirmation that was expressed in the story of the Transfiguration was unnecessary for them; they knew. Including the trial, conviction, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, that

knowledge was critical to their faith. Jesus was indeed the son of God and the affirmation of that became critical as they understood the passion in the face of their own persecution. That is the context of this evening's passage. These second century Christians knew who Jesus was/is. They need to understand the cruelty of the passion and the cruelty of their experience as a suspect sect in the context of their experience of the Son of God. For them the connection between Jesus and Moses and Elijah is less important than who he is for them going forward in very difficult circumstances. Our reading from John's Gospel knows who Jesus is because it is clear in John's prologue: *In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.* The line from our reading tonight *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself* was what John and his readers needed to affirm. All people including them were drawn to the Son of God.

But the question remains who is Jesus? Jews are clear that he is a false prophet who is at the root of their misery over centuries. Christians are divided. For the first three to four centuries, successive church councils debated how to define the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, frequently in great misery that resulted in any number of supposed "heretics" being eliminated in the most appalling, inhumane circumstances in endless acts of abject cruelty. But what the Christians did to each other, was as nothing compared to what they did to the Jews, arguably their cousins in faith.

Christians remain divided today. Was Jesus the Messiah? Jews are clear that Jesus was not the Messiah, and by every prediction of the results of the Messiah's coming in the Hebrew scriptures, they are right. The Messiah's coming was to usher in universal peace, harmony and knowledge of God. That clearly still hasn't happened. Some Christians think the Jews were simply too blind and too wicked, and that view is behind two millennia of antisemitic violence and destruction at the hands of so-called Christians. Other Christians believe that Jesus as the incarnation of God came to expand the covenant with Israel to all people and that we should be united with all humanity in expectation of the Messiah's coming, Jesus' second coming, so that the Kingdom of God should reign in all peace and harmony.

Ask yourself this question. If you were the Messiah promising harmony and peace under the loving hand of God the Father, the redeeming power of God the Son, and the sustaining power of God the Holy Spirit, would you think it opportune to come now? If we really believed Jesus came to bring us in, wouldn't we all be truly agents of God's peace. How do we fail so badly and more importantly, how do we repent? We should well know the consequences of failures in repentance; they are all around us and growing at every level: personal, local, international. Are we really ready to be one? If the Messiah were to come now, would the Messiah be welcomed, or would the Messiah be crucified? Let there be Peace on Earth, and let it begin with me, and you, and you, and you. Amen