

February 14, 2021  
Transfiguration of Our Lord (B)  
United, Oak Park

### **Seeing What Lies Ahead**

Of the novels that I've read in the past year, three of them involved fictional accounts about global pandemics. While some might delight in reading as an escape from tragedy and especially anything related to present realities, I dove into stories that pretty much described an end to civilization as most people knew it. Meanwhile my observation comparison to real life is that nothing we have experienced thus far from Covid-19 isn't anywhere close to the horrors I've read about where whole communities were basically decimated in a matter of weeks. And in that respect, the novels I read were a lot like waking up from a bad dream and realizing that reality is so much easier to face.

When Scrooge, the famous character in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* wakes up after his dreams of the ghosts of Christmases past, present, and future, he also delights that he has time to make amends and to treat others around him much better than he had been doing previously.

Seeing what might come to happen is a very helpful thing. When we can see pictures of others going through drive-up Covid testing we are better prepared for what we might face ourselves should we need to do the same thing. Knowing that other people's experiences were not so bad is of great help to us.

*Seeing what was to come* was one thing that Jesus' transfiguration before Peter, James, and John was about. In that day, going up a high mountain was symbolic of being closer to the presence of God. And it's not really too surprising that these three disciples saw a vision of Elijah and Moses appearing with Jesus. Elijah, the embodiment of the prophetic tradition, and Moses, the embodiment of the five books of the Torah, appeared alongside Jesus to punctuate the proclamation of the voice from heaven: "This is my Son, the Beloved, *listen* to him!"

Of course that whole magical moment was over and done with as quickly as it had happened, but what *remained* after it was all over was Jesus: "they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus."

And yet Jesus was enough! He was what always remained in the gospel accounts: the one who remained after the pivotal moment of his baptism, the one who suffered unto death on a cross, the one who went before his disciples to Galilee on the day of resurrection.

*Seeing Jesus* helped followers to see other aspects of God. *Seeing Jesus* helped people to recognize a greater purpose in life. *Seeing Jesus* reminded believers who they truly were. For Peter, James, and John, seeing Jesus on the mount reminded them about who had been guiding them all along and who would *stay* with them through all things.

Just days before that event, Jesus had announced to the disciples that he would be rejected by religious leaders and that he would be undergoing suffering and death. Certainly that turn of events was not a situation that the disciples felt ready to endure.

Jesus' mission had been a difficult one from the very beginning, and signs were becoming clearer that it would be even more challenging for Jesus' closest followers in the days to come. How were they to handle the confrontations with the authorities and Jesus' death? Wasn't there a way that they could preserve how things had been before? But then a

cloud came and overshadowed them—and as many of us who enter a patch of fog, Peter, James, and John became afraid.

At times when we feel that *we are lost* and groping around with limited vision, there may be only one dependable thing that will guide us as well. We have only one voice that will speak to us with absolute clarity, and it is God's voice saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

Only God can provide us with a sense of certainty in our lives. Yes, neighborhoods change. Yes, people we always thought would be there for us grow old, die, or move away. Even churches that we have known for decades experience changes.

And as we face changes in life we are inclined to look back over our shoulders, perhaps to remember seemingly safer places where we have been before, where the light seemed brighter. If we are honest, we have probably all been tempted to build some shrines to remember important experiences—like Peter, James, and John were inclined to do—in order to preserve the warm glow of some glory days forever.

Yet even in our despair and confusion, Jesus has never left us. Jesus is beside us the whole time, just as he remained with the three disciples even when the cloud came upon them. Despite the uncertainties and bewilderment we face, God's voice still speaks to us in the same way God spoke to Peter, James, and John, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him."

Christ's light still burns in our lives. Given to us freely in baptism, it continues to shine for us at any time, day or night. Christ's light is in the words of a Psalm that we remember as we face an overwhelming challenge. Christ's light is in the person of a fellow believer who keeps us in prayer when we most need it. Christ's light is in the presence of the neighbor who visits us in the hospital. We do not need to retreat to another seemingly less complicated time, because God is with us *now* too, and for many of us, our steady years of faithful habits in worship, in prayer, and in service to God give us opportunities to see how our faith will continue to guide us in the future.

Having *an image* of what God may be doing for us in the future is a help. Even in our confusion of what the church needs to be in our day

and time, things become a lot clearer when we can just focus on Jesus and on his ultimate purpose. Regardless of many things that may be changing in our world, if we have *Jesus*, that will be enough. He is the one who truly comforts us. He leads us forward. He also challenges us to make a real difference in people's lives in the face of so much hurt.

And actually *seeing Jesus* at work within our congregation, within our lives, and within our community helps us to believe that we have a real purpose and a mission too. Seeing that Jesus remains with us also helps us to believe in ourselves and to find ourselves at home in sometimes completely new surroundings. And most days just *seeing Jesus* makes *all the difference for us*.