

The Nazareth Page
A gospel thought for the home
August 6, 2017 - Transfiguration of the Lord
Matt. 17:1-9

What do you see when you look up into a clear night sky? Maybe the moon, if it's "out" that night. Maybe a smattering of stars. If you have learned a little about constellations, you might be able to recognize the Big Dipper or Orion the Hunter. During these summer months, if you live far enough away from the city lights, you can see right overhead the Milky Way (the center of our galaxy) spreading across the sky with its thousands upon thousands of stars. Or, as sometimes is the case, you might not notice any of this!

In so many ways, the act of seeing is far from simple. And appreciating what we might see is even more complex. Think of the members of your family. How deeply do you see them, appreciate them, even know them? The same can be said about friends and neighbors. Relationships of any kind can be like the icebergs that we are reading about as our planet warms. What floats above the surface of the ocean is only one-tenth of its true size and magnitude. Most is hidden unless you *really* look at it. And once you do, you will see *more*. Might this also apply to how we see others in our lives? Or even ourselves?

Today, we again are presented with that amazing moment when three of the closest disciples of Jesus *saw him in a new way*. It's called the *transfiguration*, meaning that the one that they were accustomed to seeing one way suddenly appeared in a new way. He changed before their very eyes.

But was he a different person than the one with whom they climbed that mountain? Surely not. So, did Jesus really change? In a sense, he didn't. But *how they saw him* did change. They saw him as one who related to their religious history. They saw him as one loved by God. And seeing him in those ways changed what they saw.

The transfiguration, I believe, is not a totally exceptional experience for the disciples. The point that is quite clearly made in the story is that having seen Jesus in a transformed state, he then returned to looking as he had before. But what did the disciples then see in him? That he was someone quite remarkable, one very close to God.

Now, look in the mirror. Who do you see? Do you see someone deeply loved by God? Do you see someone that God thinks about and cares for day after day? Do you see someone who has an important role to play in God's hope and dream in human history? If you answer "no," then look again.

David Thomas, PhD

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A gospel thought for the home
August 13, 2017 - 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matt. 14:22-33

Some gospel stories easily capture our attention. This is one of them. The disciples of Jesus are out in a boat. They were crossing the Sea of Galilee during the night. They knew the lake well. Some of them were fishermen. A wind suddenly comes up. Waves crash over the sides of the boat. They realize that this is no time to be out in the middle of the sea. Panic ensues. Decisions must be made. Life-saving decisions.

Then Jesus appears. Not in another boat but walking on the water. They were worried about being tossed into the turbulence and there's Jesus, dancing on the waves. Not in a boat. Not balanced on a log. Not standing on a paddleboard. The disciples are perhaps more scared than ever. What's going on?

Peter, always a bit unpredictable, wonders whether this feat of Jesus is something anyone can do. He knows these waters. So, he asks Jesus, "How's the water? Can I join you out there? Looks like fun."

Jesus smiles. "Of course you can, Peter. Just be confident and above all, don't panic. Trust that the water will hold you. One foot after the other. Nice and smooth."

So Peter edges over the side of the boat and gently places his bare feet on the water's surface. It holds! He can't believe it. He too can walk on water. He begins to walk toward Jesus. He trusted in the word of Jesus and look everyone, I can walk on water.

No sooner than he had taken a few steps, he took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the water. The waves still swirled around him. He suddenly was gripped by fright. "I can't do this," he thought. And sure enough, he began to sink. Slowly submerging, he reached out to Jesus who grabbed his hand and pulled him back to safety. They both joined the others in the boat and as they did, the wind quieted.

There was silence. Peter was embarrassed and shaking and probably wanted to be anywhere but in that boat facing Jesus. Jesus looked Peter in the eye. "You were doing quite well, Peter, until you lost it. Maybe you began to think that you were in over your head. (The others laughed.) Here's what I want you to remember. I can be trusted. If I say that you can do something, you can. But as soon as you think that you can do something all alone without me, well, you saw what just happened." Then he looked at the others. "And give Peter support. He wasn't helped when you kept calling him 'Rock.'"

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A gospel thought for the home
August 20, 2017 - 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matt. 15:21-28

Having the right contacts or connections is considered very important in life. In the business world, jobs, promotions, deals, almost everything is helped when you have the *right* contacts. It's good to be connected with a good car mechanic, a friendly loan officer and a wise and holy priest or deacon. Being connected with reliable health care professionals also helps.

In today's gospel, we are introduced to a feisty woman whose religious connections were not Jewish. She was a Canaanite. That meant her religious connections were with the people who inhabited Israel before the arrival of Moses and those referred to as "the Chosen People." Jews were not to associate with Canaanites. Nor the Canaanites with Jews. I guess this woman didn't get the message.

Her daughter was ill. She thought she was possessed by a demon, a common explanation for all sorts of conditions back then. She wanted Jesus to cure her daughter.

What's quite surprising in this story is that the initial reply by Jesus to her request for help is a big "no!" In fact, Jesus seems bothered even by her asking for help. She has no connection with him. Why is she bothering him? He has other things to do. Important things with *his* people.

But she persists and we might wonder whether she is making a big mistake. After all, Jesus was clear. He's not there for her or her daughter. She challenges him with a situation. When people eat at table, some of the crumbs from their bread are likely to fall on the ground. If there are dogs around, you can guess what happens next. (Side comment: This seems to be a timeless example.) She then equates herself and her daughter with the dogs willing to survive on scraps if that's all they have. In a sense, she has worked Jesus into a corner. He relents. The woman has won. Her determination has paid off. And I would assume that this was not a loss for Jesus. It was as we say, "a win-win."

Here are some things to think about. If your prayers are not answered by God right away, keep trying. Be careful in judging who God favors and who God doesn't favor. Receiving a "no" may be what you hear right before you hear a "yes." Finally, some women are very persistent and God can work with that. In fact, God already has.

David Thomas, PhD

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A gospel thought for the home
August 27, 2017 - 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matt. 16:13-20

Years ago, one of our sons asked me to drive him to a school dance. He wasn't old enough to drive himself. "Just drop me off at the door, Dad, and don't tell anyone that you're my dad."

I smiled. I know that parents can be an embarrassment. Or his friends might get the wrong idea about me. So the "drop off" went quickly and I remained in the shadows.

In today's gospel Jesus says to his disciples, right after Peter had correctly identified him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," that they should not tell anyone that he was the Christ. What's going on? Did not Jesus, the Son of God, come to us so that we might know the true nature of God? He asked his disciples about their view of him and Peter had answered correctly. You would think that the next thing would be Jesus saying that they (the disciples, led by Peter) should now go to the ends of the earth telling everyone that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah sent by God. But instead he said, "Don't tell anyone." What's going on?

Here's what I think. Peter got the words right, but Jesus could look into his heart and knew that Peter (and the other disciples) didn't yet understand the full meaning of his messianic mission. If left on their own, right after Peter's correct (though partial) answer to Jesus, they would likely misrepresent his message. They would have some of the right words, but were likely to twist them into something incomplete. Mostly, they would miss the whole matter of his suffering and death.

Many people who lived at that time expected the Messiah to come either as a mighty king who would defeat the Roman legions in Israel, or, in even more spectacular fashion, the Messiah would come from heaven breathing lightning and thunder and dramatically establish his reign over all the earth. In both cases, the Messiah would come with tremendous power and might and put the "bad people" in their place. The coming of God's kingdom, they thought, was all about some kind of worldly power.

But that was not God's intent. The power of God was not to be shown in strength of arms or conquest of nature, but in the power of love, of giving oneself in serving others. We believe that Jesus came "for us and our salvation." He wanted all to have a deep relationship with God who loved us, all of us. My son didn't want his friends to have a false impression of me so he asked me to just drop him off and leave. Jesus did the opposite. He wanted his disciples to stay around to get the full meaning of his mission, a mission that eventually involved some very unexpected moments.

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