Moses’ Transfiguration

摩西變貌

Luke 9:28-36 ： Exodus 34:29-35 3/2/20

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Introduction:

For rational thinkers, the stories of Moses or Jesus’ transfigurations can seem quite strange, as they depict transformation, the reappearance of ancient legendary figures, and a voice from the clouds. However, we believe these to be true miraculous stories with profound theological realities and social impacts.

This story presents us with a powerful image of Jesus, reminding us of the exhilaration and joy of mountaintop experiences. When we descend, we can focus and face challenges with hope, just as Jesus and his disciples came down from the mountain and entered the dark days of his suffering and death in Jerusalem.

This journey event calls for "courage." When we feel drained in the mundane days of life, we can return to this mountaintop experience for renewal.

Prayer for illumination

*Almighty God, in your light may we see light, in your truth may we see truth and in your Holy Word may we be called into holy work.* May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight*, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

Verse 30: "Behold! Jesus' glorious face, his dazzling clothes, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah." One of Luke’s storytelling features is the invitation to "see," to bear witness and spread the story of Jesus.

God’s divinity and majesty are "glorious" and "visible," making the experience of witnessing Jesus' tangible glory essential. This glory is both mysterious and hopeful. Let us carefully examine what the transfiguration conveys and encompasses.

A close look at the Transfiguration of Jesus focuses on Christ at its center before shifting to the disciples.

Verse 31: "They appeared in glory and spoke of his departure." The Chinese text says "his departure," but the English NRSV translates it as "his exodus," which is clearer.

Luke uniquely records Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah. Discussing Jesus’ "exodus" is rich in detail and significance, reflecting Luke’s interpretation of Jesus' death.

Jewish apocalyptic literature often links past legendary figures, such as Moses and Elijah. Elijah is said to have ascended to heaven in a whirlwind and chariot of fire. While Moses died and was buried, his burial site remains unknown.

Moses also saw the Lord face-to-face (Exodus 34:6-9), and his face shone so brightly afterward that the Israelites couldn’t look at him directly. More importantly, Moses and Elijah symbolize the Law and the Prophets.

The connection to Exodus and Elijah reminds readers that God delivers His people from bondage. God called Moses to save His people, just as He sent Jesus Christ to save all humanity. Jesus’ exodus would deliver people from the power of death.

Like Moses, Jesus experienced God’s majesty. Like Moses, though chosen, he did not walk an easy path. The term "exodus" recalls plagues, blood, the death of the firstborn, and Egypt’s relentless oppression.

Shortly after his transfiguration, Jesus and his disciples would go to Jerusalem, beginning his exodus journey. Breaking free from any oppressor’s power comes at a cost.

Imagine the difficulty of that time for Jesus and his disciples. He tried to clarify what was to come and the cost of discipleship, yet they resisted, even after Jesus predicted his suffering and death.

Just as in Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed while his closest friends were too weary to stay awake, here, the disciples are described as sleeping deeply at a crucial moment—only Luke includes this detail.

The disciples' reactions in this story are worth noting. Only in Luke's account is it mentioned that these three men 'were very sleepy.' While this detail may seem small, it uniquely contributes to the story—just when the scene becomes extraordinary, the disciples are dozing off on the mountain.

Whether they succumbed to sleep and woke just in time to "see His glory" or managed to stay awake, different translations interpret the complex Greek text in various ways. Perhaps they had already fallen asleep, perhaps they were merely resting their eyes, or perhaps they were struggling with all their might to stay awake. The debate exists, but these details do not diminish the significance of the moment.

Regardless, their eyes opened just in time. When the disciples saw the vision of the transfiguration, they desperately tried to hold onto it. Peter suggested building shelters for each of them so they could remain together.

But Jesus said they needed to return to the people. Elijah and Moses disappeared into the cloud that enveloped them. From the cloud, God’s voice affirmed Jesus’ identity and commanded the disciples to listen to Him.

While Peter, James, and John had this awe-inspiring experience, the other nine disciples did not. Most of us are likely more like those nine, seeking experiences of hope to sustain us through hardships like the exodus and Golgotha.

Even in the face of such a miraculous transfiguration, the disciples were exhausted.  
This is understandable. They had been working hard and had just climbed an entire mountain. It’s easy to sympathize with their need for rest. But Luke directs our attention elsewhere.

Luke parallels this with Acts 20, where a young disciple named Eutychus fell asleep during Paul’s sermon and fell from a third-story window.

In both cases, sleep and exhaustion overcame the disciples. The common thread: a miracle, a sermon, but sleep won the battle.

Therefore, we must stay awake. For some people, it should be about rest and taking care of themselves, understanding the limitations of their body and mind.

It seems like just yesterday we read this same passage. But in the past year, we have gone through much—Advent, budgeting, forming a building committee, mourning friends, and sitting together in concern for this broken world.

It has been a long road. We may feel like we have just climbed a mountain, knowing Easter is coming, and we must conserve our energy. But the transfiguration is not about rest for the weary.

Returning to this passage annually, as if climbing the mountain again, prompts reflection:

1. weary of the routine of church life? How can you bring new vitality to old rhythms?
2. How do we celebrate the transfiguration? What can we do to make this day feel as significant as it should?
3. How can we focus on God’s work—especially when so much news is difficult to watch?

Now is the time! Wake up! God is at work! Jesus is alive!

Of course, Peter wanted to freeze time—"Let’s build three shelters and stay here." But the transfiguration was fleeting, and Jesus had other work to do. He said they must return to the people.

Elijah and Moses disappeared into the cloud, and from it, God affirmed Jesus' identity and commanded the disciples to listen to Him.

In summary, the transfiguration story teaches us four things:

* The Trinity on the mountaintop radiates shared glory, giving meaning to past and future events. Only in a community of faith can God’s glory be fully realized. No one shines alone—even Jesus revealed the Trinity’s work.
* When the light fades into shadow and clouds, it is from these very places that God’s voice affirms Jesus. As we illuminate the lives of those in society’s shadows, we must remember that from the shadows and clouds, God’s voice emerges to affirm Jesus.
* Jesus’ transfiguration is a metamorphosis—a fundamental transformation preparing Him to return to the people and continue His work. Though the disciples wanted to remain with these spiritual giants, basking in Jesus’ glory, they were called back to their lives.
* In the face of divine presence, we must learn silence and prayer.

This entire passage is framed by prayer. Proseuchesthai (to pray, offer prayer) appears twice at the beginning (verses 28, 29). At the moment Jesus prayed, his appearance and clothing changed.

Luke emphasizes Jesus’ connection with God through prayer. The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to heal, call disciples, resist temptation, and preach truth.

Like the disciples, we follow Jesus in prayer, drawing near to God and returning to the people. Only then do we understand the transfiguration’s meaning.

This is an invitation for the Lenten season, where we walk the journey with Jesus in these two concrete ways.

First，You are invited to join us for a daily devotion experience at Lent Devotion, where we will be immersing ourselves in the Gospel of Luke through the inspiring daily reflections of "On the Way" by Dr. Jackie Smallbone.

Each day, we will journey through the teachings of Jesus, learning from the profound messages found in Luke’s Gospel. Dr. Smallbone’s insightful devotionals will guide us step by step, encouraging deeper reflection and fostering a closer walk with Christ.

Join ATPC family every day on this transformative journey of faith, as we walk together "on the way" with Christ.

Secondly, go out to serve the senior and children. Participate in the Good Neighbor activities; this Tuesday, the meeting will resume. In alignment with the EM's plan: serve at the community food bank or homeless shelter, as well as volunteer for VBS and engage with children.

As we offer ourselves to draw near to the Lord and love our neighbors, may the transfigured Lord renew us. This is the meaning of Jesus' transfiguration. May the Lord bless those who hear His word and put it into action.