

Rev. Lacey Hunter
February 23, 2020
Title: Home By Another Way...Again
Text: Matthew 17:1-9

In the fall of 2015, I had the opportunity to walk El Camino de Santiago, a 500-mile pilgrimage across northern Spain that leads to the Cathedral of St. James. This was not an easy journey for me, to say the least. There were new pains in my legs, feet and shoulders each day, and every mile brought a new opportunity to discover something about myself. If you have ever spent time really journeying with yourself, then perhaps you know that coming face-to-face with yourself isn't always a comfortable process. As I walked, I connected with past experiences, traumas, decisions, and questions that had not yet received the kind of care and compassion they deserved.

There was one week in particular, when the winds were pushing hard, the rain was heavy and every path was more mud to sink into. I remember thinking, "Every part of me knows this feeling"—the feeling of wind pushing against me, of sinking and struggling, and I yelled at God as I walked. On one of these especially windy days, I eventually arrived at a convent where I could stay the night. Now church, maybe it was that I was soaking wet or because I had spent the day yelling at the heavens, but these nuns seemed like the warmest, most dazzlingly hospitable people I had met in awhile. In the lobby of the convent they gathered all the pilgrims together and invited us into a sing-a-long, each person sharing a favorite song from their country. Then after dinner, they invited us to the pilgrims' mass, where they blessed each one of us with a small paper star to guide our way and remind us we were not alone. It was so much the kindness that I needed in that moment that I began to think, "Maybe I shouldn't leave here. Maybe I am not meant to go to Santiago. Maybe I've arrived. Maybe this place is where my Camino has been leading me all this time." I wanted to stay, church. I wanted to hold on to that warmth, that place. I didn't want that feeling to change.

When morning came, despite my desires to cling, I laced up my boots, strapped on my pack, and walked back out into the rain, the blessing of simple kindnesses and grace-filled hospitality that this community gave me now dwelling inside of me.

I wonder if that is how the disciples felt in this transfiguration moment, high up on the mountaintop with Jesus. Some of the gospel texts tell us that Jesus takes the disciples up the mountain to pray and that while he was praying, "the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white." And, as if Jesus appearing suddenly in radiant glow wasn't enough, then standing beside him, talking with him, were the ancient prophets, Moses and Elijah. I mean, it's all pretty astonishing, right?! So what do the disciples do in this moment of transformation and prophesy fulfilled? They try to hold on to this miracle. They ask if they can grasp and cling to this glory. Peter says to Jesus, "Lord, if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." In their awe, they wish to build a house, a sanctuary, a church...something that could contain this glory, something that could make this moment last, something they could touch, something that could give them a chance to take it all in and be in this

amazement forever. And why not long for this permanence, standing on a mountain with Jesus dazzling and the prophets you have long followed? How could you not feel as if you have finally arrived and wish for that moment to last forever? But if the season of Epiphany has taught us anything, it's that the encounter with God's glory is just the beginning of a journey home by a new way. For the glory of transfiguration to be fully revealed, Jesus and the disciples had to strap on their packs and come down the mountain.

Perhaps you too can relate to the disciples in this transfiguration story. Perhaps you have experienced some kind of scarcity, change, amazement, confusion or anxiety that caused you to want to hold on tight or bask in the wonder. Yet, just like with the disciples, God calls us out into the world saying, "My Chosen, My Beloveds, listen!" Here on this high mountaintop, like in the deep waters of baptism, we are once again reminded that God's grace and glory dwells within us always and is called forth from us.

The story of transfiguration is about dazzling truths that call us to shine forth as our truest selves, about witnessing to the glory of God that radiates from each of us and is all around us. Maybe Jesus dazzled brightly because, despite every obstacle, he had become so fully the person God had called him to be. What would you need to be transfigured—to change in the world, so that you can fully become the person God created you to be? I would need homophobia and misogyny to be transfigured. I would need the world to change into a place that respects leadership that rises up from sometimes quiet places. I would need confidence that I am enough. What would you need to be transfigured and how can we come down from the mountain together and help make it so? Up on this mountaintop, when we come face-to-face with ourselves and with God, that is when the work of transfiguration begins.

On the next day. On the very next day when Jesus and the disciples came down from the mountain, they met a father whose son was convulsing with the presence of demons. The disciples and Jesus had to learn how to be a part of the healing from those demons. And as their transfiguration journey, their journey toward freedom, truth and healing continued, they were led towards Jerusalem where tables would be overturned, where oppressive imperial systems would be called out and dismantled, where meals would be prepared for all people and bodies and lives would be given for the hope and glory of a new day. This is our daily transfiguration task, to love ourselves and the world so fully, so openly that we come down from the mountain and take up our part in co-creating God's kin-dom on earth. Today, we are transfigured bodies like dazzling love letters from God, called forth to be part of the healing of the world.

The season of Epiphany began with the story of three wise people who, after witnessing the glory of God, dreamed a new way home for themselves and for the safety of their community. The season of Epiphany brought us the story of Jesus' baptism, the power of the waters that connect us, that call us Beloved and anoint our higher purposes. On this Transfiguration Sunday—this threshold Sunday between Epiphany and Lent—we are invited again, to behold God's tender, dazzling glory, strap on our packs, and come down the mountain.

Like the disciples, we too do not know all that we will encounter on our journey. There may be uncertainties in your life that you are wrestling with, or fear and anxiety about the world we live in, about upcoming days like Super Tuesday and a year of elections. It could be tempting to stay where it is comfortable, to stay in the warm convent with the singing nuns, to only gather with people who look and think like you. But the thing about transfigurations is that the glory that we encounter along the way cannot be limited, it lives inside of us and comes with us down the mountain.

I offer this words for the journey, from the poet and theologian, Jan Richardson:

If you could see
the journey whole
you might never
undertake it;
might never dare
the first step
that propels you
from the place
you have known
toward the place
you know not.

Call it
one of the mercies
of the road:
that we see it
only by stages
as it opens
before us,
as it comes into
our keeping
step by
single step.

There is nothing
for it
but to go...

This is the blessing of transfiguration. We may not yet know all that this blessing will ask of us or where we will end up but we can trust that this blessing is for the healing of the world and for the freedom of all. May it be so. Amen.