

Mountain-Top Fantasy and Bottom-Life Reality Luke 9: 28-36

Today we celebrate Transfiguration Sunday of the Lord, Valentine's Day, and in addition, Chinese's New Year's Day according to the Lunar Calendar. Within our church, we have decided to designate today Love Feast Day. After our worship service, we will all share in a Love Feast luncheon.

Traditionally, Transfiguration Sunday is a major Feast Day in the life of the church, and so should include the celebration of Holy Communion. Transfiguration Sunday marks the end of Ordinary Time in the Christian liturgical calendar, after Epiphany, and makes a transition to the disciplines and worship by the faithful during the upcoming season of Lent.

Jesus was an expert mountain hiker. One day he left for a mountain hike, taking three of his closest disciples, Peter, James and John up to a mountain, for prayer. They probably hiked up Mount Hermon, which rises to a height of 2,900 meters, 9,500 feet above sea-level. Mount Hermon is located about forty miles north from Galilee.

In 1995, Sun and I joined a tour group to the Holy Land in the fall. We had been on Mount Hermon by bus. It was cold on the mountain. On top of the mountain there was a monastery, a memorial building of the Transfiguration of Jesus, where there were three wall paintings, of Jesus, Moses and Elijah. We had a moment of silent prayer in that place and took a picture.

According to the Scripture, Luke reports, there Jesus was transformed (rather than changed in appearance) and his garments shone with heavenly brightness. While Jesus was praying on the mountain, his face and clothing changed to dazzling white, Moses and Elijah appeared, and a voice from a cloud said, "This is my Son! My chosen. Listen to him!" When Peter saw this scene, Peter suggested to the Lord that he would make three tents for them so that they could remain there instead of returning to ordinary life. However, after the transfiguration, Jesus and the disciples climbed down the mountain back to life as they had left it. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of man has been raised from the dead."

The transfiguration marks an important stage in the revelation of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. It is an experience similar to his baptism. Here, his glory is revealed, not just through his deeds, but in a more personal way. The glory denotes the royal presence, for the kingdom of God in the midst of his people.

There are many features about the account which derive significance from the Old Testament. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets, witnessing the Messiah and being fulfilled and superseded by him. Each of them had had a vision of the glory of God on a mountain: Moses on Sinai (Ex. 24:15) and Elijah on Horeb (1King 19:8). Each of them left no known grave. The Law of Moses and the coming of Elijah are mentioned

together in the last verse of the Old Testament (Mal 4:4-6). Some have postulated that the two men who appeared at Jesus' empty tomb (Lk 24:4) were Moses and Elijah.

The transfiguration is, therefore, a focal point in the revelation of the kingdom of God, for it looks back to the Old Testament, and shows how Christ fulfils it, and it looks on to the great events of the cross, resurrection, ascension and ending of the world.. Peter was wrong in trying to make the experience permanent. The transfiguration thus also calls the disciples back to the realities of their vocation --- to follow one who will lead them through death in all its power, and not around it, to life. In this way, Luke's gospel calls us into Lent to "begin with the end in mind."

A four-year-old and six-year-old girl were playing "house," when suddenly, the six-year-old girl asked her four-year-old sister, "If you have to choose a husband between two men, one who is poor but has good eyes and the other who is rich but has poor eyes, which one would you chose as your husband? I would choose one who is poor but has good eyes." Then, the four-year-old girl replied, "I would choose the one who is rich but has contact lenses!"

If you are to choose one, either a life rich in this world, or rich in everlasting life in another world, which one you would choose? Peter might choose the everlasting world. Thus, he said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Sun had surgery one time when my daughter, Esther, was about two years old. After surgery, she moved to the recovery room, but she was still unconscious due to the anesthesia. She was murmuring, "No I don't want to go back. I want to stay here! Let me stay here please." I woke her up and asked her what was wrong with her in her dream. Then, Sun realized that she had been in a dream, and that she had seen something. The story that she told me was that she was walking along the seashore with a guide who seemed to be an old man with a white beard, wearing a bright, white garment. It was a wonderful place, calm, peaceful and beautiful. And then, the old guide told her, "Its time to go back!" It seemed it had been too short to and too good for her to leave. Rather, she would have liked to stay there, so she asked him to stay. Then, the old guide told her, "Its time to go and they are waiting for you," pointing to the opposite side of the river where her daughter, Esther, and her husband, I, were playing together. She said, honestly to me, she had wanted to stay there where she dreamed.

But, Jesus said them, "Let's come down from the mountain to where the people are waiting for us." The next day, when Jesus and his three disciples came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams. It throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not." There were problems waiting for Jesus, since there was no one who had the power to drive out the evil spirit.

Today is Valentine's Day. Have you heard of the origin of Valentine's Day?

One origin of Valentine's Day harkens back to the Roman Empire. In about 3 A.D., there was a priest named Valentine. At that time, the emperor Claudius announced the rule of forbidding marriage among the young people to increase the power of the Roman military. But, the priest Valentine officiated over marriage ceremonies secretly among the young people, ignoring the emperor's rule. Later, the priest Valentine's works were unveiled, and he was killed by the emperor and became a martyr for the sake of young people in February 14, 269 A.D. Later, the priest Valentine was called a saint and the day Valentine was martyred became commemorated as Saint Valentine's Day. The message seems to be, Love is mightier than the sword.

Love is not so much expressed as a spoken word, but as a word of the heart. When you say to another, "I love you," your heart should be trembling. When you hear a voice saying, "I love you," your heart also trembles.

Do you remember who your first love is? Who do you think about your first love? When I was eleven years old, I lived in a small town, and at that time there were many friends in my church. One day, when I was in my room, I heard a knocking at my bedroom window. I opened a curtain at the window, and found a girl was running away from my window, and found the word, "love," written on the glass traced by her finger. My heart trembled at the word, "love," written by the girl's finger. She was my pastor's sister-in-law who visited her sister and stayed for a month over summer vacation. She had joined our MYF group, and right before she returned home, she had knocked on my window, and then left for her home in Seoul. The next year my pastor moved far away to another big church. After that, I had never seen the girl again. Was the girl my first love?

Henri J.M. Nouwen, a famous priest and scholar, wrote a book, *Home Tonight*. In his book he writes about the first love and second love. "I slowly became aware, but only in my head, of something about 'the first love' and 'second love.' I became more and more intellectually clear that the first love comes from the ultimate life force we call God, who has loved me unconditionally before others knew or loved me. 'I have loved you with an everlasting love.' And I saw that the second love, the love of parents, family, and friends, was only a modified expression of the first love."

Now, you know what I mean by "the first love." The first love you and I have is eternal and unchangeable. We are called to respond to the first love: that God has loved us. This is our calling. Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Do you love me?" "Yes, Lord. I love you." "Then feed my lambs."

Where is the power to drive out the evil spirit? The disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer." (Mark 9:29) I believe that without prayer we cannot love well, without love we cannot pray well. And without prayer and love, we will not have faith that can drive out the evil spirit and heal emotional, physical and spiritual pain. This love comes from the first love of God.