

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

February 14, 2021

Transfiguration Sunday/Last Epiphany, Year B

The readings this week:

- 2 Kings 2:1-12 ◦ Psalm 50:1-6
- 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 ◦ Mark 9:2-9



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## Spiritual Vertigo

Recently I took a class (for continuing education) at [General Seminary in NYC](#) with the esteemed Esther de Waal. She was absolutely fabulous, in her own wonderfully eccentric way. In our first class she said that when people enter places that completely overwhelm them—such as a grand cathedral or a monumental museum—they tend to gravitate toward the various plaques and placards which dot the walls. The placards which describe *this* stained glass window, or *that* work of art.

She said that people gravitate towards those things as anchors, so that they don't emotionally and spiritually sink into the mire.

They can't handle the sheer weight of a soaring vault or work-after-work of Matisse, and so they find the little squares with plain writing on them as a defense mechanism to get them through the experience.

The problem is, of course, that if you spend most of your time with the little square plaques you miss out on the opportunity to truly experience something—something that, if you let it, might end up changing you in some way.

This lesson is used in Year B of the Revised Common Lectionary for the last week in the Season of Epiphany. Of course, Epiphany begins on January 6th with the Magi arriving at the Christ-child after a long journey. Matthew tells us that once they were there, they were *overwhelmed with joy*.

I think that's a great phrase which sums up what the Christian life looks like when it comes nearer and nearer to Christ. We are all meant to be *overwhelmed with joy*.

Overwhelmed at the manger. Overwhelmed at the cross (though perhaps not with joy, per se). Certainly overwhelmed at the empty tomb.

The three disciples, Peter, James, and John, are taken up the mountaintop in Mark 9, and they are indeed overwhelmed! But, not in the same way that the Magi were.

The Magi were overwhelmed in the sense that they were filled with wonder. They were awe-struck.

Peter, James, and John are overwhelmed in the sense that they are *terrified*.

They are so terrified/overwhelmed that they don't know quite what to do. They don't know what to say. Peter wants to build some tabernacles—because...that's a...good idea...?

The transfiguration is certainly a Christological event—it *says* something about Jesus. Jesus is at center of it all, and even the pillars of the Hebrew Bible are there to demonstrate that.

But, it's also a scene which says a lot about the disciples, and thereby discipleship itself. They were taken up the mountaintop, and they had their socks knocked off. AND, they were totally and completely spiritually unprepared for such an experience.

They were the tourists being ushered into Notre Dame de Paris, and forsaking the ribbed vaulting and rose window for the cardboard rectangles they couldn't read anyway.

There's something that separates the Magi from the inner-circle of the disciples here. And, it's something we need to latch onto. It's something that we need to spiritually work towards.

So that when Jesus takes us somewhere to completely blow our mind with the grandeur and grace of Almighty God, we're ready. We're prepared. And, we're overwhelmed—not with fear— but with joy and wonder in all God's works.

~ Rick Morely, [a garden path](#)



# Reflecting on the Word



## \_\_\_ 1st Reading: [2 Kings 2:1-12](#)

This story records only words and actions, not feelings and motives, why do you think that is? Why do you think Elijah commanded his disciple to stay behind these three times? Why do you think that Elisha commands the prophets to remain silent? Was Elisha's request greedy and/or ambitious? Why was this request one that Elijah himself could not grant or deny? Even if we didn't know anything about Elijah's prior deeds, what can we learn about him... from the actions of the other prophets that day? From Elisha's loyalty? From the way that he "died"? Why do you think God chose a fiery display, rather than just making Elijah disappear? Even though the writer does not tell us Elisha's feelings, what can we learn about his emotions once Elijah has been taken into heaven? Elisha obviously learned more from his master than just a profession. What other things did Elijah pass on? What do we learn from this story about the way God works through us to train others? Who is looking up to you today? To whom will you pass on a mantle of leadership and service? [Faith Element](#)

## \_\_\_ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 50:1-6](#)

In this opening of Psalm 50, God reveals Godself and God's glory is not strictly silent. God speaks and the earth is, the rising and the setting of the sun is. The description of God and God's acts here are different from other revelations of God seen in the Scriptures, like when God revealed Godself to Elijah. Elijah sees God's back and God is in the sound, or the voice, of sheer silence (1 Kings 19:12). The contrast is one reminder that God's revelation – and Godself – is not limited. What glory do you experience in "silence"? What silence is found in the forces of nature? What images and forces come to mind when you think about God? [Sermons That Work](#)



## Praying Toward Sunday

Radiant God, source of light, as you surrounded Jesus with your glory, so you come to us in penetrating brightness. You catch us off guard and expose our weakness. We choose the limelight while you call us to explore the shadows and brighten the darkness. We seek the spectacular while you bind up the broken in countless acts of mercy. We seek to stay on the mountain or in a comfortable pew while you walk to the valleys of need. Radiant God, fill us with light and courage to carry good news into all the corners of the world and to bring back the joy of your presence. Amen

~ [Many Voices.org](#)

A high mountain. The cloud of Presence. The voice of the Most High. The disciples fall into ecstasy. They see time disassemble. They see Jesus, Moses, and Elijah outside of time talking about something that will happen in time, Jesus' "exodus".

And the light! Orthodox Christians call it "Tabor Light". It is this light that transfigured Moses, so that he had to wear a veil. It is the light which blinded Paul on his way to Damascus. It is the light at the boundary of the soul, alluring us in meditation to continue deepening, and remaining faithful when prayer is dark.

You may see the unseeable and realize that light lives in the heart of the soul, in seeking truth, in love. But you must come down from the mountain and up from the soul's chambers to face the next task at hand - utter littleness, perhaps, Jerusalem, giving yourself in love. Or even Lent.

Coming down from the mountain,  
and up from my soul's chambers,  
I am yours.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

## \_\_\_ 3rd Reading: [2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#)

In what ways is the image of light as a metaphor for God's teaching like the images of the whirlwind, the consuming flame and the raging storm in today's lesson from 2 Kings and Psalm 50? Does Paul connect Jesus with Moses and Elijah? How? Does he connect himself with the line of prophets? What "god of this world" might blind us from seeing the Good News of Jesus Christ as preached by the apostle Paul? As messengers of the Gospel, in what ways do we carry God's unveiled light for all, even our critics, to see? [Sermons That Work](#)

## \_\_\_ 4th Reading: [Mark 9:2-9](#)

Why did Jesus only select three of his disciples? What happened on the mountain? What did the disciples see? What was their reaction? How would you have felt if you saw Moses and Jesus today? What did God say to the three disciples? Why was that important to say? Have you ever been in a situation where you just didn't know what to do or say so you started making suggestions to get beyond the uncomfortable moment? Is that what Peter was doing? Why is this event so important? Why was the transfiguration important to the early church? What does it say to you today? [Bible Wise](#)