

I missed a series of Sunday services from about mid June to mid July, for various family occasions. Fortunately, I was able to receive weekly communion in a variety of settings during that period, including a memorable Wednesday night service at Grace Episcopal church in Astoria, Oregon. Not receiving enough precipitation this past winter, Connie and I decided to travel to Astoria to celebrate our 40th anniversary. Astoria may be the rain capital of the lower 48 states, and we almost turned around as we walked to the church, as we were getting soaked. However, we persevered. Just as Fr. Dick got to the part of the Prayers of the People when he said "for seasonable weather", a shaft of rare sunlight shone through a church window, and lit him up with a white glow. After the service, the lone other congregant said, "did you see that?" We confirmed that we had indeed.

Luke 9 28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

There is so much to wonder at in this day's Gospel portion. I am going to emphasize Moses, Elijah, Chosen, Listen and Silence.

30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.

In our Old Testament portion today, In Exodus 34 verses 29 through 35 we hear about the result of the theophany that Moses experienced. By the way, the word theophany means the manifestation of God to man.

Moses had encountered the real presence of God, and as an outward sign of his proximity to the Holy one "the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God." Clearly, Luke's intention in telling us about the Transfiguration is to let us know that just as Moses had been close enough to God to be Transfigured, Jesus too was in intimate proximity to the Holy One, and, so, he too glowed in dazzling whiteness.

Elijah is also crucial to the story. In second Kings, chapter 2, verse 11 as Elijah was talking to his disciple Elisha, we read "As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven." Luke emphasizes the Ascension in his history of Jesus, covered at the end of his Gospel in Luke 24 verse 51 "While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven." and at the beginning of Acts, also written by Luke, Chapter 1, verse

9 "When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." Just as Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle, and continued his work, Luke is telling us that Jesus is the ultimate successor to Elijah, to fulfill his work.

The presence of Moses and Elijah is also meant to show how Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the Law, and all of the Prophets. Moses is the ultimate symbol of the law, and Elijah is the ultimate symbol of the prophets. In case we miss the point, Jesus tells us at the end of Luke's gospel in chapter 24, in verse 44 "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

The Jewish scripture is called the TaNaK. This is an acronym in which T is for Torah, the five books of Moses, or the Law, N is for Nevi'im, the prophets, and K is for Ketuvim, the writings. Jesus is the fulfillment of all of Jewish scripture. The Jewish canon was set as to the Law and Prophets at the time of Luke's Gospel, but the Writings were still being debated, as to what was in, and what was out. The certainty of the Writings was that the Psalms were for sure in the canon. The Psalms are as appropriate a lead symbol for the Writings, as Moses is for the Law, and Elijah is for the Prophets.

35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

The next thing that I want to discuss is Choice. Karl Barth is often considered the greatest modern Calvinist theologian. What particularly impresses me, is his insight into the Elect. The word Elect means the same thing as Choice. When we have an Election, we make a Choice.

Calvinist Protestants have often suffered over the concept of the Elect. Am I one of the Elect, or will I suffer eternally? Barth's insight is that God has made his Choice, and his Choice is Jesus. This is my Son, My Chosen. Through God's election of Jesus, the door to Universal salvation is blasted wide open. Pope John Paul II, as I read him, made it clear that it is a legitimate Christian Hope to believe in Universal Salvation through the Father's Chosen One.

I believe that it is appropriate for the Christian to hope for universal salvation. Part of my belief is informed by the insight of the fourth century saint, Athanasius, who memorably said that "He became Us, so that We could become Him." I am going to run with that, and state that it is my belief that Christians can legitimately hope that all can participate in Transfiguration and Ascension, due to Christ's intervention in the world.

Specifically, as to the Transfiguration, the Gospel gives us two clues: Listen, and Be silent. Orthodox Christians call the Transfiguration experience the Light of Tabor, and have developed some techniques for participating in that Light that we are going to tryout today.

In pursuit of participation in the Transfiguration experience, Orthodox Christians seek to be in a prayerful state, prepared to listen. When the Father says "Listen to Him", he means in a state of the kind of Humility that leads to

obedience. The word obedience actually means to listen to, to hearken to, and so, if we really hear Jesus, we will turn and obey, just as Moses turned and obeyed when he heard the voice of God come from the Burning Bush. The word humility comes from the word humus, the living portion of the earth, and reminds us that all of us come from the same root stock; all of us are children of the earth. The Jesus Prayer is a favorite for achieving a state of obedience and humility.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, Have mercy on me, a sinner.
(Repeat three times with the congregation.) When we say that prayer, we are aligning ourselves with the humble tax collector, who knows he is a sinner, and throws himself on God's mercy. We are prepared to listen.

36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

What about silence? First of all, the word mystical means closed mouth. The witnesses to the Transfiguration were silenced by the awesomeness of their experience. Elijah only heard God's voice when the noise of nature died away, and all that was left was silence. A technique for achieving silence is to chant a portion of Psalm 46, verse 11.

Be Still and Know that I am God. (chant with congregation).

The last time I saw my father, he was translucent. Light shown through him, as he was disappearing. It is in dying to ourselves that the light of God can be revealed through us. As the prayer of St. Francis ends, it is in death that we are born to eternal life. To be self-effacing is not to be just modest, not just humble, but to so erase oneself that we become a window through whom others can see the Light of Tabor.

Heavenly Father, We thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ through Whom we are One-d to You. We ask for the gift of inner silence, so that we can really Obey your Holy Word. Let us so glow with the Light of Tabor, that others will turn from their paths, when they come near us, and through us see the Burning Bush of your Presence. We ask for all of this for the sake of Your Son's Holy Name. Amen.