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St. James', Mt. Airy  
2/7/16

Last Epiphany C/Transfiguration  
Exodus 34:29-35  
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2  
Luke 9:28-36 (37-43a)

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

Today we are on the mountaintop with Jesus and his closest friends.

What happened up there is a mystery. It's no mistake Jesus' transfigured appearance evokes Moses' shining face when in the presence of God. It is reminiscent of Jesus' baptism, with the voice calling down from heaven. It looks forward to the garden of Gethsemane with the disciples falling asleep. It points toward what will be the experience of Jesus appearing after the resurrection.

It was all of that, and yet also more than we comprehend.

But for all the mystery and majesty of this story, it is simple in its call to us as followers of Christ.

*Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.*

This is what Jesus does. At key moments throughout the Gospel Jesus withdraws from the crowds, either alone or with a few friends, and he prays.

He went to pray, this time, in order to set his face and his feet toward Jerusalem.

But as is evidenced by Jesus' rejection of Peter's idea to build booths to mark the holy place where they experienced the presence of God, this was never meant as a private experience of spirituality removed from the public square. It was a vision to carry down, a glimpse of unimagined possibility for life at ground level.<sup>1</sup>

And so the next day they went down the mountain. The word translated here for the departing is *exodos*.

In the accounts of Israel's history, the *exodos* marked the beginning of the long journey into the promised land.

For Jesus and his friends, this *exodos* marks the journey toward the cross, and eventually the empty tomb.

But before they could even take a step toward Jerusalem, there waiting for them at the foot of the mountain was a crowd, and within that crowd was a family in need of healing.

A father called to Jesus to heal his son whose suffering was too great for disciples to heal. Jesus restored the boy to health and all who witnessed it were astounded at the greatness of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Lori Brandt Hale, Theological Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 1*.

Only then did they depart, and from there, Jesus was prayerful and bold as he moved toward his destiny in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

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Pray and heal. These are what this story calls us into as followers of Christ. These are our *exodos* into the world.

Throughout his ministry Jesus was faithful in spiritual disciplines that would bring him into the presence of God. Throughout his ministry he reached out again and again to bring healing and reconciliation to the sick and the marginalized. We must likewise be people of prayer and resolute in our mission.

But as we see with even the disciples, who miss the point of the mountaintop experience and can't heal the boy, professing faith in Christ is one thing, but living our Christian faith requires greater depth and breadth in our spiritual formation.

In the second century early Christian theologian Tertullian said 'Christians are made, not born.'

I believe this with my whole heart. It is the work of a lifetime, learning and practicing, to become a Christian. This is why we have Sunday School and Youth Group, this is why we need solid adult formation courses and Outreach ministries. This is why we have the circle of the church year, which invites us into a flow of prayer and practice.

Today we stand on the cusp of Lent, a season in which the three pillars of practice are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffery L. Tribble Sr., Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 1*.

You will be invited into each of these in various ways throughout the season, but this year we are making prayer our special focus.

Families, there will be devotional materials out for children and youth beginning on Shrove Tuesday for you to pick up and take home. Next Sunday I'm going to get to spend some time with our Sunday School kids and we'll look at prayer that you can make in the kitchen and enjoy eating!

Starting on Tuesday there will also be devotional materials for adults, including booklets of daily reflections from Episcopal Relief & Development. Episcopal Relief is the Outreach arm of our national church and is at work in over 40 countries around the world. If you don't know much about this part of our church's mission then I invite you to learn more as they are one of the highest ranked charities out there and a few years ago was selected alongside Doctors Without Borders as the best international charity.

And plan on gathering here on Monday nights in Lent as we explore creating a life of prayer. Each week we will focus on learning about and practicing together different forms of prayer as a way to spark your desire to reinvigorate your own prayer life. As a seminary professor of mine once said, you have to learn to pray somewhere, some of the time, before you can pray everywhere, all of the time.

Beginning February 15 we will examine Lectio Divina, the practice of sacred reading, and then in the weeks following will consider Centering Prayer, Praying with Our Bodies, Ignatian Contemplation, and The Anglican Rosary. Join us for all, or as many as you can.

Jesus was transfigured on the mountaintop not in essence, only in appearance. But he calls for us to be transfigured wholly – through prayer and his mission of justice, compassion, and reconciliation.

My prayer this week for all of us is that as we gather on Shrove Tuesday to feast, as we come together to worship and mark our bodies with the entry into Lent on Ash Wednesday, and as we come once again to our yearly pilgrimage with Jesus to Jerusalem, we make time and space in our lives for the making of ourselves into Christians.

~ AMEN ~