

March 3, Transfiguration C (Exodus 34:29–35; Luke 9:28–43a; 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2)

## **Jesus' transfiguration should have implications for how its witnesses will live.**

by [T. Denise Anderson](#) in the [January 30, 2019](#) issue

One of my favorite shows is *How It's Made*, which walks viewers through the way things we use every day are created. From padlocks to pencils to whatever else you take for granted and buy at the store without much thought to how it got there—this program shows you its genesis and all the various parts that have to move in order for it to come into being. It gives you a proverbial peek behind the curtain of something that is usually a mystery, or not even on the radar of our curiosity. Once you see how a ballpoint pen is made, you will never look at one the same way again.

Transfiguration Sunday is the day we commemorate the further revealing of who God is in Jesus Christ. And just as that ballpoint pen becomes a thing of wonder once you realize what went into making it, so too does our sense of wonderment deepen when we come into a greater realization of who and what God is.

What's more, that realization and new understanding transform the seer.

But let's rewind and spend some time with Moses. Moses spends days on Sinai conversing with Lord and receiving the law on two stone tablets. When he descends, his face is shining. The residue of the Lord's presence is still on his face—or perhaps he has taken the Lord with him! I think this would have been a remarkable thing to see.

The people, however, are afraid. In their understanding, no one sees God and lives to tell the tale. They fear for themselves. Maybe they are reminded even of their own inadequacies. At any rate, even though God is fine with the people gazing upon God's glory, the people aren't trying to see it.

After Moses shares the law with the people, he veils his face. The only time he takes the veil off is when he goes back to speak to the Lord, which I think is a shame

because the people are missing out on an opportunity to witness God's glory. But no one wants to get closer or to adjust their eyes to the brightness.

You simply can't see something like that and be unaffected. I think perhaps the people of Israel know that being in the presence of something that remarkable would require them to change. Indeed, they would die—but maybe not in the way they thought. Perhaps in the presence of God, having received God's law, they would find new life. And since the new is often frightening, we don't want any part of that.

At Jesus' Transfiguration and the sight of him communing with Moses (the law) and Elijah (the prophets), Peter wants to commemorate the event with altars in honor of each. He wants to freeze this moment in time, and I'm sure if he had a smartphone he would be recording the whole thing. But a voice from heaven interrupts and says, "Listen to him!"

Just as Moses brings the law to the people so that it will be heard and heeded, Jesus' transfiguration should have implications for how its witnesses will live their lives thereafter. Eventually, they all will have to come down from the mountain and be with the people. They will have to act upon what they saw and heard.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of Moses and of the Israelites' veil, the hardening of the mind that kept them from fully living into the glory of God. They didn't want to be changed. Neither do we at times. We don't know what change will mean for us, what it will take away from us, where it will call us to go, or what it will call us to do. We're often more comfortable with being religious than we are with being changed. We resist being changed in a way that we can be agents of healing. We resist being changed in a way that will make us purveyors of justice. We resist being changed in a way that will enable us to share God's glory instead of hiding from it or trying to hold onto it.

But when the disciples come down from the mountain, they are met with an opportunity to heal a sick boy. They can't do it. Maybe mentally they are still on the mountain. Sometimes we walk through a world that is sick and in need of help, but mentally we're not there. We're still in church. We're still thinking about our own spiritual lives, what devotional we'll read next, or what tasks we have to do around the church. But if those things don't produce righteousness, healing, and freedom beyond ourselves, what good are they? What good is our healing if the people

around us stay sick?

We know who Jesus is. Therefore, it is incumbent that we act upon that knowledge. It is my prayer that Jesus' church will set aside our veils. They have already been removed in Christ Jesus. Why pick them back up? Let us sit at the Son's feet and listen to him. Let us willingly submit to being transformed, so that we may gaze upon the glory of the Lord "as though reflected in a mirror" and be transformed into the same image. That change within us can produce change around us and beyond.