

# Boxed, Contained, Filed under God

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Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-36

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Humans don't really know what to do with glory. It's all a bit too much.

Today, I'd like to use the Transfiguration to stare in the headlamps of Glory. I'm not going to talk very much about what God did on that mountain but rather what our human response is to something magnificent.

Transfiguration is defined as "a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful and spiritual state." More generally, we say an entirely altered state.

Let's think back to those moments when you saw your own small transfigurations. When you looked at the person you were 'seeing' (dating) and saw them in a different light – either as someone amazingly special or suddenly, simply a lot less than your imagination had created.

In a truer sense, was it when you turned and saw your bride gliding towards you and into a whole new life? That moment when they are no longer just plain, knock about, best friend, Jane, but rather soul-mate, life-mate, transforming genius and stunningly beautiful? Or those of you with daughters, when they appear dressed for their first formal and you realise you have raised a woman – not a child?

Take a moment and recapture those physical sensations: the dry mouth and perhaps a pounding heart. Were you light-headed? Did the room fade away or go dark at the edges? Now this is a little harder – stay with me, what about the feelings? Fear? Awe? Terror? Inadequacy? Pride?

Transfiguration – when what you are looking at, what you just know as 'normal' is suddenly transformed and you see it/him/her – in a different light and most importantly, with a different understanding. Maybe understanding is the wrong word – it is a knowledge that is a whole lot deeper – even if you don't understand it.

How do we handle that? Well, take these 3 men up a mountain for some quiet time with their Rabbi. They are all supposed to be praying but clearly, they were sneak-peeping at Jesus. Why? Herod asked the question, who is this guy? May they were thinking the same. Where is He leading us? Or maybe they thought they could learn how to pray by watching him. Humans have questioned their prayerful ability since

...well, forever. “May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord...”<sup>1</sup>

Watching him pray out of the corner of their eyes, they notice a difference. The intensity of his prayer seems to be creating a dazzling light. Gosh, if only I could pray like that. And as they watched? Peeked? They saw Jesus in conversation with Moses and Elijah. They saw ‘the glory’ and three great men talking.

What was their response? Number one – build something. Why? To mark the occasion? A cairn would have done that. (a cairn being a pile of stones) Maybe they want to capture it and create a space where they might have that experience once more. To box it. Put it in a neat place – away from them...But somewhere they can visit.

Humans have tried to put God in a box ever since they left the Garden of Eden. God in a box is controllable, safe, not meddling in your life.

And the 2<sup>nd</sup> response? Never speak of it again. What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. A common pact of a shared, terrifying, unexplainable experience to never speak of it again. We have seen this with veterans. It’s all too raw and real – and unreal. No one can call *them* crazy. No one can judge.

And that’s how we deal with glory.

Glory in our society has been cheapened. It has been tinsel-towned with Warhol’s 15 minutes of fame – with selfies and podcast heroes of their own making. With every Oscar awarded ‘thanks to God’. Glory has been confused with euphoria and that’s what many of the newer churches provide as well as some of the ancient traditions of Sufi and whirling dervishes. Weekly euphoria is a terrific immune booster but it does not always lead to God. It can, but not always. It can be a substitute for some and addictive for many.

Even reference to the Glory of God does not have the social capital that it once had – we are a little embarrassed by it. Like Peter and James – we don’t talk about it. Perhaps we fear what others might think or perhaps we are afraid that speaking of God’s glory makes God too remote from the human experience. It’s too big.

But we still witness glory at dawn on the ocean and in moments of nature’s perfection. We express that wonder in a safe and often disconnected way.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 19:14

“The text for Transfiguration Sunday, insist that glory is, whether comfortable or not, the right word for God and even for those who are touched by God’s presence”.<sup>2</sup>

In our world, we have referred to people as ‘glowing’. I certainly have had moments where I felt the hand of God upon me. But do we speak of it? We box it, file it in memories. As we get older and don’t care quite as much what people think, we might bring out those moments in conversation like precious jewels from our living treasury.

But up on the mountain, the question, ‘who is this guy?’ the same question Herod asked is answered in dazzling light and most importantly, it is voiced. “this is my son, my chosen. Listen to Him!” Given voice – no question.

This passage also foreshadows Jesus’ death. How can ‘glory’ be so temporary and yet so permanent? Dazzling and then gone? With us but unseen? The answer to that still lies in the mystery of God.

Many texts say Peter and James’s silence is a proper response that acknowledges the mystery of this event and the magnitude of its implications. To be honest, it would not have been good for James and Peter to speak of this at the time. Jesus had earlier warned them not to tell anyone of his identity. He might not have meant this to be mysterious but simply a matter of safety. But their on-going silence speaks of their own lack of readiness to the task of witnessing. They were just not ready. They were not ‘cooked’ as disciples yet.

There are many more lessons to be learned before they understand what God meant when he said “Listen to Him!” before they begin to build the new body of Christ.

That brings me back to us and our inadequacy to give voice to glory.

We are afraid and sometimes embarrassed to express our awe. We are conscious of not making others uncomfortable. That is a kindness. Hopefully, we let our actions speak of our discipleship. Thankfully, as long as we meet as a community, we can give full voice to our awe and wonder. When we sing of the Glory – we can express it with our whole being. *This* is a safe place where we can declare, without reservation,

- along with our sense of inadequacy
- and our vulnerabilities

God is great! Amazing! Mysterious and transforming.

We don’t have to peak at another to see it – we only have to watch and listen.

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<sup>2</sup> Texts for Preaching, Cousar, Gaventa et al P. 179