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Transfiguration Part 1

John Dear | Feb. 13, 2007 On the Road to Peace

When I first met Daniel Berrigan, I wanted his advice about the life that lay ahead for me, but I didn't know exactly what to say. "What's the point of all this?" I finally asked him.

Dan took my awkward question seriously. "All we have to do is make our lives fit into the story of Jesus," he said. "We have to get our lives to make sense in light of the Gospel."

What a helpful answer! I never forgot it. The Christian life, I was learning, is fashioned after the life of Jesus. As his followers, we have to know his story, enter his story, and make our story part of his story. The Gospel, in other words, is the measure of our lives.

According to the story, after several years of non-stop service, preaching, healing, and other public works, Jesus retreated up a mountain in search of prayerful solitude, the affirming presence of his beloved God, and the strength to go forward to the cross. His spiritual experience on the mountaintop confirmed his public mission to seek justice, make peace, and lay down his life for humanity. This contemplative event renewed his determination to go to Jerusalem no matter what, because it was there, on the mountain, that God again called him "My Beloved." It was there on the mountain that his self-understanding was confirmed in person by Moses and Elijah, who encouraged him to fulfill his vocation as the nonviolent Messiah. It was there on the mountain that he experienced a foretaste of the glory to come in God's reign of light and resurrection.

By sharing that experience with his friends, Jesus passed on a great lesson. We too can take time from our life journey, climb the mountain of God and recognize the risen Christ in our midst. We too can awake to see the transfigured Christ before us and hear the voice of God instruct us to listen more attentively to Jesus and do what he says. We too can take heart and go forward into the world with the Gospel mission of serving the needy, resisting evil, doing good and proclaiming peace. We too can receive a glimpse of the new life to come in God's reign of light and resurrection.

Every one of us can have a transfiguration experience at some point in our lives if we dare follow Jesus all the way to the cross and resurrection. The more we enter into the story of Jesus, the more we too will share his every experience. At some point, we too will have a sacramental experience of hearing God call us God's beloved, as Jesus did when he sat by the Jordan River after his baptism. We too can share his public ministry of healing, teaching, challenging injustice and promoting justice. We too can enter his private life of community with friends, table fellowship with the marginalized, and intimate solitude with God. At some point, as we walk the road to our own Jerusalems, we too can climb the mountain of God and suddenly recognize Christ in our midst. We too can hear God tell us once again to listen to him.

If we dare listen to Jesus and follow him closely on the road to peace, I am learning, we too are transformed, and at some point, if only for a moment, even transfigured. Our lives are changed into light and love, we realize that we are God's beloved sons and daughters, and we shed Christ's light for others, guiding them through this world of darkness. We ourselves glimpse the new life of resurrection to come. Encouraged by the transfigured Christ, by our own modern day Moseses and Elijahs, we take another step on the Gospel journey of nonviolence into the world's violence. We listen closely to the words of Jesus, and put them into practice. We even find strength to carry the cross of nonviolent resistance to injustice, and welcome the risen Christ's gift of peace in our hearts and in the world.

By walking with Jesus and sharing in his work here and now, we meet the transfigured Christ who, in turn, transforms us, confirms our mission and encourages us to continue his work for the reign of God. If we remain faithful to the journey, we will be transfigured, persecuted, crucified and risen--and the risen Christ himself will welcome us home into the house of light and peace.

This little meditation on the story of Jesus' transfiguration grows out of my own discipleship journey over these last difficult years for the church and the world. As I meditate on my journey and the story of the Transfiguration, I discover again that all we have to do is walk with Jesus, listen to Jesus, wait for Jesus, love Jesus, be with Jesus, serve Jesus, see Jesus in suffering humanity, practice Jesus' way of active nonviolence and welcome Jesus' reign of peace.

The best way to understand life in these tumultuous times, then, is to see it as a pilgrimage journey on the road with Jesus. I am learning once again that as we enter into the story of Jesus and continue his mission of love and peace, we will see the living Christ transfigured in our midst. We will hear the voice of God call us to listen and be reenergized to go forward on the Gospel journey. Though we will undoubtedly face the cross, if we heed the transfigured Christ and follow him step by step down the mountain to Jerusalem, ready to proclaim the good news of peace and practice his compassionate love, somehow, someway, someday, we too will share his resurrection. The Transfiguration is the sign of that promise.

The above is the introduction to John Dear's new book, *Transfiguration*, which features a foreword by Archbishop Tutu and will be published next week by Doubleday. It can be ordered at www.amazon.com [1] or your local bookstore. For further information, see www.fatherjohndear.org [2]

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