

Sermon Notes: August 6, 2023

Focus: Transfiguration

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Biblical account of the Transfiguration

(Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36)

These accounts state that Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, to a mountain (maybe Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon). At the top, he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, while his clothes became radiant white. This event reveals Jesus' divine trajectory and his connection to the past as seen in Moses and Elijah. Mountaintops hold symbolic importance as a place of divine revelation, making Jesus' transfiguration parallel to Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai (similar but different, see side note on page 2).

The transfiguration reinforced the belief among the disciples that he was the Messiah and Scripture's fulfillment. During the transfiguration, two figures from the Old Testament, Elijah and Moses, appear and talk with Jesus. Moses represents the "Law" and Elijah for the "Prophets."

Of the three disciples that went up, Peter responds to the transfiguration by offering to build three shelters or tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. This response *might* have been influenced by the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). Sukkot involves constructing temporary shelters to commemorate the Israelites' journey through the wilderness. I will talk more about that in the section called Festival of Booths.

Transfiguration biblical cross references

- Jesus is like Moses - Exodus 34
- He's heavenly - Daniel 7
- He shines like the sun - Matthew 13
- His bright white appearance alludes to a future reconciliation - Revelation 7

Moses and Elijah - reflecting the shine

- They already had their experience with God and show up as cheerleaders
- They supported and confirmed God's continued use of Jesus
- They were symbols of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) being completed in Jesus.

Peter and us - doing our part

We are part of the story too. Peter was drawing on his Jewish upbringing to participate in God's fullness. He was responding in faith. It is way too easy to hear this story and cringe at Peter's foolish sincerity and meager offer to build three booths of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. I really like seeing him try. Peter had the privilege of having this experience and was literally and metaphorically offering to construct space for God in his life. Peter trying to build booths *may*

also have connection to Sukkot, the Jewish festival of booth. Page 2 is my attempt to reflect on Peter offering his construction skills.

Festival of Booths

The Feast of Tabernacles, Booths, and Sukkot are all different names for the same Jewish holiday. Sukkot involves building temporary shelters (sukkahs) to commemorate the Israelites' dwellings during their wilderness journey (after being enslaved in Egypt).

Sukkot is also known as the "Festival of Joy" or "Season of Rejoicing." It is a time of celebration and thanksgiving in Jewish tradition. Similarly, the transfiguration event is a moment of divine revelation and glory which is a cause for joy and celebration for Jesus' disciples.

Sukkot is also associated with the concept of God's presence dwelling among the people. During the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, representing the Law and the Prophets, and a voice from a cloud declared Jesus as God's Son, and divine presence dwelt among them (all six).

Feast of Tabernacles: This is the English translation of Sukkot. Today, Jewish families still build and dwell in temporary sukkot to commemorate the time when the Israelites lived in makeshift huts during their journey in the wilderness (after the Exodus from Egypt). Sukkot is celebrated in the fall, usually in September or October, following the solemn Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. It is a harvest festival, as well as remembrance of the protection and sustenance that God provided to the Israelites during their journey in the desert.

During Sukkot today, families eat their meals, study, and sometimes even sleep in the sukkah, which is a reminder of the temporary and fragile nature of life, as well as a symbol of trust in God's care and providence. The holiday also has a set of rituals, including the waving of the "Four Species" (a bundle of palm, myrtle, willow, and citron), which symbolizes unity and the abundance of the harvest.

Last side note: Moses' transfiguration (sort of)

Moses did have significant encounters with God on Mount Sinai. After one of these encounters, Moses' face shone with such radiance that he veiled it when speaking to the Israelites, as described in Exodus 34:29-35. Despite both Moses and Jesus having significant mountain-top encounters, the transfiguration of Jesus is unique and specific to the New Testament. Moses' radiance is described as a temporary and visible reflection of his encounters with God on Mount Sinai, but it is not referred to as a "transfiguration" event in the same sense as the one involving Jesus.

Finally

I hope my sermon helps us put ourselves in Peter, James, and John's place. May we be encouraged to offer our best to God even when it might feel as silly as pitching a tent in the face of radiant glory. We could do worse.

Todd