

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'^[a]

⁴So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.

What then are we to say was gained by^[a] Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

¹³For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I^[a] will make three dwellings^[b] here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved;^[c] with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.'⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

I texted a friend of mine the other day. She is retiring this week from a job she has held for over twenty years, so I sent her a message to say I was thinking of her in this last week, and sent her my blessings. She responded with thanks, and the comment that it was a bit scary, leaving the job she'd done for so long.

At this point my phone, in addition to producing a blank input line for me to send a reply, gave me three options for instant replies — all I needed to do was touch one, if I wanted to send it. The three options were

Why?

Yes! Yes! Yes!

Uh-oh!

Now, none of these options was really appropriate, or expressed what I might want to say to my friend at that particular point in time. But then I started thinking about them — Why? — Yes! Yes! Yes! — Uh-oh! You know, there's a certain genius there. Those three expressions could cover quite a range of situations. Your eight-year-old comes in and tells you that he's just painted the cow green — Why? You find an extra \$50 bill in your wallet which you didn't think you had — Yes! Yes! Yes! You're driving down the road at 100 ks and your car starts making a funny noise — Uh-oh!

It's good to be ready, to know what you might say, in these confusing times, so you don't get caught unawares. There are times when we feel like Peter in our Gospel story of the Transfiguration. He is on the mountaintop alone with Jesus, and suddenly Moses and Elijah are there too. Peter recognises them, which is interesting in itself, as of course he's never seen them, since they've been dead for centuries. Suddenly, he thinks of hospitality. There are three men, so he'll make three tents for them to live in. I don't know that this is the first thought that would come to me in such a situation. In Mark's version of the story, Peter "did not know what to say, for they were terrified" (9:6). In Luke, he offers the tents, "not knowing what he said" (9:33). I can accept that. But if Peter had had my cell phone, which of the three options would he have chosen? Why? Why are Elijah and Moses here? Or Yes! Yes! Yes! — this is really cool that they've appeared! Or uh-oh! Should I be seeing this? Is this like seeing the face of God and maybe not surviving it?

Well, it was a frightening and confusing moment for Peter, as well as for James and John, who Matthew says were with him. They had been granted an important vision. This Jesus they had been following? He's not just a teacher from Galilee. He talks to dead prophets as an equal. And his face and clothes have become dazzling, like the sun. Jesus is revealing his true nature to them, and not holding back. Although he cautions them afterwards not to tell anyone, that is probably in vain — they could not possibly keep such a vision to themselves. And God wants to make sure Peter and the others understand what is happening, so God says, "This is my Son

... listen to him!” (Matt 17:5). After this there is no doubt about Jesus, at least in the minds of these three men.

This vision comes to Peter through faith. Shortly before this episode, as told by Matthew, Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ 15 He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ 16 Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah,[c] the Son of the living God.’ (Matt 16:14-16)

Peter answers correctly, and Jesus goes on to tell him that “on this rock I will build my church” (16:18), making a play on words, as the name Peter means rock. Peter’s faith has been building throughout the time he travelled with Jesus, and faith is rewarded. As it says about Abraham in the book of Genesis, “[Abraham] believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). Abraham put his faith in the Lord, and Peter does as well, although he famously stumbles a bit when he denies Jesus immediately following his arrest. Just as Abraham believed God after hearing God’s voice, Peter believes after hearing God’s declaration about his beloved Son. But the faith came first, and then the vision, in both cases. Peter declares that Jesus is the Son of God, and later is rewarded with the vision we call the Transfiguration. As Paul points out, Abraham was not made the ancestor of us all through the things he did, but through his faith; and through faith he became righteous in God’s eyes. Peter also gains Jesus’ favour through faith, and is then made the great apostle who brought many to faith, as a willing and able servant of God.

In this life, it seems that God reveals to us what we need to know when we need to know it. That is part of God’s love and care of us. Faith is greater than knowledge, for often we do not know why God has called us to this or that, but we move forward in faith that it is the best thing for us to do. Setting out in faith, in accordance with what you believe to be God’s will, means that you will have God’s blessing at every step. It does not mean that all will go well, according to your human perception; for both Abraham and Peter had setbacks and times of great difficulty. But it does mean that you are playing your part in God’s world, the part that God wants you to play.

One thing more about the Transfiguration: there are only two places in the Gospels where God breaks in directly to human events. The first is at Jesus’ baptism, when the voice from heaven says, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). The second is on the mountaintop, as we have been discussing, when God speaks the same words, but adds the clear demand, “Listen to him!” These interventions by God happen at important moments in Jesus’ ministry. The first occurs when Jesus begins his ministry, for immediately after his baptism, he goes into the wilderness to prepare, and is tempted there by the devil, which is essential preparation for his ministry among his people. It signals to us that this man, this Jesus, is going to do a great thing among us, and has God’s full blessing and approval; not just

the general approval God might have of any prophet prophesying truthfully in God's name, but the clear stamp and sign of God's will.

The second time God's voice is heard, Jesus is entering the final stage of his ministry. He still has a bit of teaching to do, and a little ways to travel to the cross; but the light in his face and in his clothing are a foreshadowing of the radiant glory to come when he rises again from the earth. God's intervention here shows his continuing approval of what Jesus has done and will do when the time comes. As we continue to follow on Jesus' journey to the cross, we know that he is travelling towards something unbelievably glorious — yet we may believe, and God yearns for us to believe, so that God may show his true love and grace to all of us who make the journey with Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.