

TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD, C
Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-36 [37-43]

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I'm not a big fan of roller coasters. When we visited Legoland a few years ago, even a very tame kiddie roller coaster had me gripping the safety bar for dear life and uttering words that no mother of a 5-year-old should say in their child's hearing.

Last fall we went to Oaks Park and Andrew talked me into riding something called the Spider. It had several big black arms that stretched out with cars at the end to hold people. When it got going, the whole contraption turned around, the arms went up and down, and each individual car also spun around at varying speeds, sometimes slow, sometimes fast. Totally random and very disorienting. My son absolutely loved it. He screamed with joy the whole time. I spent most of the ride trying to focus my eyes firmly on a still point inside our car, because whenever I lost focus I got that dizzy "I might get sick" feeling.

I do remember one strange, peaceful interlude during that ride, when they were loading or unloading, when our particular car was stopped way up at the top of the ride, just hanging up there in mid-air, leaning back at an angle. It seemed like a long time we were suspended up there. And it could even have been pleasant, a kind of top-of-the-world experience. I could have just leaned back and enjoyed that time with my son, looking around at the treetops and sky... if I could have *relaxed*. But there was always that question: When's this thing gonna start moving again? What's it gonna be like then?

Even people who enjoy roller coasters and thrill rides for entertainment don't appreciate them much when they happen in real life. And I've been hearing from a lot of people lately who are riding roller coasters for real.

Economic hard times are rolling over us, with job trouble and financial problems people never expected to face. I notice more cars parked on our neighborhood street these days, as young adults have moved back home. Other people are dealing with illness or fragile health in their families. Some elders are making moves to new living situations that better meet their needs. Even when it's a change we welcome, it can be disorienting to make the adjustment. Sometimes we need extra support to deal with it, and there's no certainly no shame in that.

A report from Haiti suggested that one thing they really need right now is psychiatrists and trained counselors to help people cope. A human being can only

process so much change, so fast. People in Haiti need safe spaces to grieve their losses and gradually adjust to life as it is from now on.

But it doesn't take a catastrophe to make us disoriented. Anybody's life involves a series of normal, challenging changes. Babies and toddlers change amazingly fast. Adolescents do too. And young adulthood, midlife, our later years all bring their own significant shifts, so that for as long as we're alive and growing and maturing, we are constantly adapting to changes around us and changes within us.

Jesus certainly led his disciples through some changes as they were maturing as his followers. And at times it was a wild ride.

Jesus sent them out to the villages to do teaching and healing, and they were swamped with people in need. When he brought them back together it wasn't for a relaxing day off but to deliver some disturbing news: one day he was going to die and rise again. That was something they just couldn't take in.

Then Jesus took a few of them up a mountain to pray, and they experienced one of the strangest events in all the gospels. A vision of Jesus transformed in light, complete with ancient heroes Moses and Elijah, a sacred cloud, a divine voice: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" It was like time stood still for that moment, to show them who Jesus really was.

Peter wanted to keep that moment still, freeze the action, build a monument to capture it. Was he inspired or just overloaded, his head spinning? If somehow he could just stop all the changes and stay in that holy moment forever...

But Jesus would allow no lingering on top of the world. Back down the mountain he led them, away from that still point of revelation, and right back into chaotic crowds of human need.

Talk about a roller coaster! From the still, shining glory of God to the wild ride experienced by the boy with epilepsy. His illness convulsed him, mauled him, dashed him to the ground—until Jesus cast out the sickness, leaving everyone astounded at God's greatness. Every bit as astounded as they were on the mountain. Every bit as overwhelmed by God's glory, this time embodied in compassionate, healing love.

Every place the Bible tells the story of the transfiguration, it follows it with this particular story of the boy being set free and restored. Because there's no way to separate that still and shining vision from what Christ does among the writhing, hurting people. That glory on the mountaintop, that glory contained in Christ, came to earth specifically to enter into our wild ride and release people from bondage. To shine hope and healing into every place of need and pain. In Christ,

the glory that shines above also shines in every way throughout this earth, rescuing and saving and bringing new birth.

This world is a hurting place, and if we could have fixed it by ourselves, we would have done that already. When we see Jesus make this boy whole, it gives us a glimpse of the huge work Christ has come to accomplish, by drawing all of us into God's work of compassion and peace.

It's not the peace of a silent grave or even a still and shining mountaintop, where nothing ever changes. The peace Jesus brings is a dynamic peace, it's on the move, it reaches out. It's the peace that shares and gives and receives, that comes down the mountain to mix it up with the likes of us.

Jesus draws into something we can't yet see the ending of. Only God knows that ending. We are drawn into the constant outreaching motion that is God's work. And we do what the disciples do. We listen to our Lord, and we just keep following, up to the mountain and down to the valleys, because we trust that the way Jesus leads us, really is life.

I have a dear friend I've known for years, a person of faith. We've seen each other through many cycles of life's roller coaster. For her it's been a couple moves across the country, breast cancer, a job ending suddenly, and everything that goes with adapting to new challenges.

Right now she says it feels like she and her husband are in suspended animation. They're empty nesters, underemployed in today's economy, ready to take on a new challenge but nothing is coming through for them, not yet.

My friend is hanging up there at the top of the thrill ride. Or it could be that she's standing on the mountaintop with Jesus. It's hard to know. Her life certainly wouldn't seem to be bathed with light and heavenly revelation. But she is living each day in trust and faith toward God. She is numbering the daily graces as they come. A circle of friends, children who are finding their way, simple gifts like beauty that she notices in nature or in art... She is keeping her eyes and ears open. She is looking toward the Christ. She is listening to the Chosen One.

It's what we do, as people claimed by Christ. Sometimes the ride is thrilling, and sometimes it's just rough. Sometimes we might want nothing more than to get off. Other times we experience the joy God gives even as we are holding on for dear life. And through it all, God is with us, through all the changes. God is working God's good purposes in us and through us, to share God's saving and healing work in every place of need we go.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

