

**Exodus 34:29-35**

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

**Luke 9:28-36**

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen. (403)

This is a view of the end from the middle, the end having broken into and entered the middle. This mountaintop vision is a peek of the end of time from the middle of time, a peek into the fact that life continues, indeed life abounds in glory, on the other side of the horizon of the known world, the horizon of time and history and whatever progress we make on this plane of existence, great progress, meager progress, terrible regress...

Time was the mainline church didn't have to bother with eschatology—for that's what this is called, eschatology, talk of the end, talk of the eschaton. Time was the mainline church didn't have to bother with such talk because we had every reason to believe in historical progress, that history would itself produce the fruits of glory, the fruits hope and joy and peace. We would tinker our way to glory. We would reach the end of history where all would be democracy and its rewards, which are freedom from tyranny, abounding goodness by lightly regulated global capitalism, and total enlightenment by human empowerment to choose from among options always the best ones

because of rational self-interest. The moderate, self-regulating, utterly pragmatic mainline church had every reason to believe God's glory would be manifest in time because of sound human reasoning and practiced faithfulness and moderate behavior and American can-do-ism and good common sense. Time was...

We've had yet another week, and I'd say worse than all before. The ambush of President Zelenskyy in the Oval Office on Friday: it's hard to know what to say about it, what to say that the likes of Bret Stephens, David French, and Jamelle Bouie haven't already said, three people who share space on the *New York Times* editorial page but otherwise write from very different points of view—all though in agreement this was a monstrous display. Meanwhile in Europe they're coming to grips. French Europe Minister said on French news on Saturday (and here translated), "We cannot leave the security of Europe in the hands of voters in Wisconsin every 4 years." See, the whims of Americans, the whims a decreasing number of Americans, fewer and fewer still, are a decadence the world can no longer afford, which is to our loss as much as anyone else's. Western liberal democracies will create a new alliance, and we won't be a part of that, it being no longer clear that we're a liberal democracy.

Time was the mainline church in America didn't have to bother with eschatology because our hopes would be realized in history—but then there are the times when hope can only be found from the longest and widest perspective on history that can be imagined, a view of the end broken and entered into time. "I'm here! I'm here. Come on through. Come on through."

The Transfiguration is something we hear of every year. On the last Sunday of the season after Epiphany, on the Sunday before the beginning of Lent, we go to the mountaintop with Peter and James and John, and we see along with them once again God's glory manifest in Jesus. Recalling us to his baptism, we once again see there's something of Jesus that is transhistorical, transcendent. The generosity of spirit, the resilience and resolve in resisting the use of violence, the faithfulness to the God of all creation, faithful even to the point of death, even death on a cross: this is not a matter of astonishing human willpower but of the will and way and insistence of God, God's good and gracious end made to live in the middle of things.

We hear it every year. I'll admit I don't look forward to it. There seems so little to say, since I always feel like I said this last year.

But every year we hear a different account of it of the three we have in the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and every account has different tones and emphases and shades of meaning.

Luke's gospel, for example: this is one that has Jesus often at prayer, which we see in this account of the Transfiguration. This is an event, according to Luke, that is the fruit of prayer.

Luke's gospel also is alone in knowing the content of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah, both appearing with him. The other gospel narratives have them in conversation, but not a conversation we're privy to. In Luke, though...

These two were to represent the Law and the Prophets. In appearing with Jesus, they showed that Jesus wasn't a radical break from tradition, a new start. No, their being here showed that Jesus was a continuation of tradition, a renewal of a religious practice that had fallen into crisis.

By the time of Luke's writing, as more faintly was the case at the time when Jesus lived, the Temple had already been destroyed and Rome had continued in its dreadful War against the Jews, which decimated the Jewish population and scattered what was left into diasporic living, people literally heading for the hills, hills that were to be found further and further away. Imagine, if you can, an enormous empire with violence at its core coming after a small neighbor because for empires enough is never enough and because some rulers just don't know when to stop.

This move of Roman enormity against tiny Judea threw the whole Jewish enterprise into question. Now no longer in the land, now no longer able to practice (as was mandated) in the Temple, what would become of the Jewish way?

The Gospel of Luke encourages that Jesus is to be followed as the renewed Law.

It's not an unproblematic claim now. The Jews (thank God) survive, and Jewish practice (thank God) continues as ever even without a Temple. So, it's not unproblematic to claim that Jesus is the right and proper Jewish way, which would cast Christians as the new chosen people. But back then it was not the triumphalist claim it should be heard to be now. As my professor in the Jewish Liturgical Year, he himself an Orthodox Jew, understands it: Judaism of the post-second Temple period, which is to say rabbinic Judaism or current Judaism, and the Church are siblings, even twins, born of the same historical moment. And you know how siblings: Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob. We must be very careful here.

But as far as a notion *then*, when Luke was writing, it sounds hopeful notes: there is another chapter, there is another era, we can live into the future though its dark with unknowns and explosive with insecurity. There is more to come, and it glimmers even with possibility.

They were speaking of Jesus' departure, according to Luke, Moses and Elijah and Jesus were. They were speaking of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. And

interesting, the word for departure is *exodus*, meaning they were speaking of the exodus Jesus was about to accomplish in Jerusalem, with his death on the cross. You see? This is literally to cast Jesus as a new Moses and to cast what the crucifixion accomplished as a getting out, a getting out from an enslaved state, a getting out from an exploitative empire that is only after the sweat of your labor, the pumping of your blood, and the promise of your offspring to keep it all going.

What's more, it casts the coming crucifixion in this tradition with no question as to whether he might not accomplish it but with an understanding that he would indeed accomplish it. There's a sureness of it, a *fait accompli*. There is in Christ an exodus from empire, a moving through and out the other side of death and its dominion, which every kingdom and empire the world has ever known enables death so to dominate. The threat of violence, the fear of powerful wrath, the punishing effect every politics ever known to humanity has managed to wield: moving through these and out the other side is what Jesus according to Luke accomplishes in Jerusalem, on the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, seated at the right hand of the Father and calling to come on through. "Come on through!"

This is the eschaton; this is the end about which God is the guarantor. And having it break into time, having it enter as revelation into history, having Jesus appear transfigured and glorified and speaking of the exodus he would soon accomplish, him a new Moses and all the world a greater Israel: this all makes possible a living out of the resurrection even now, starting now. We can live into the end we trust Jesus to have accomplished, we can live *out* of this end. We can live resurrection even now.

I went to New Orleans a few weeks ago. I'd never been before and (to be honest) it had never really seemed like a place I'd want to go. I only chose it because I misread an internet search that suggested it's a direct flight to New Orleans both from here and from Minneapolis. This made it so us four Goodmans could all meet up during the boys' college winter break, meet up in a place that was neither here, where we were having a cold winter, nor Minneapolis, where "cold" is an insufficient word. They'd had temperatures hit -30. New Orleans promised to be around 65 degrees. Perfection.

Turns out, it's not a direct flight from here but it's worth the trip, nonetheless, if you want to see what living the resurrection looks like.

And I know, when you're away on vacation, wherever "away" is, often seems perfect. And I know, Louisiana isn't usually 65 degrees but is rather, usually, from April-October, blisteringly hot; and though it's surrounded by water—the Mississippi River, Lake Pontchartrain, the Gulf of

Mexico (yes, I said it) and the everywhere groundwater—there's nowhere to swim. Because, I also know, New Orleans suffers pollution, and also poverty and weakened politics and ecological vulnerability on a scale that makes the city sui generis, the one and only of its kind at least in the United States.

Hurricane Katrina, twenty years ago, is a most recent example of this, which called to mind even in popular imagination the flood waters Noah suffered. These, please remember, weren't called in scripture merely waters of a heavy rainfall but were called the fountains of the deep let loose and the windows of the heavens opened, as if the firmament itself had collapsed. That dome created in the beginning according to first few verses of Genesis, wherein air and dry land appeared: it collapsed back into the water chaos of pre-creation.

Of course, Katrina was hardly the only time death came for the city. New Orleans sits below sea level and water, everywhere, awaits like a serpent to strike. This has the city as if dwelling in that mythic dome, which collapses every few decades, making storms, floods, and then tides of yellow fever be an every-decade or so disaster that comes as a matter of course—whenever in far north Minnesota and Iowa winter brings heavy snowfall which, when melting, swells the river that is the best friend of the city and its most crushing enemy, swelling it to rush and to slow, and to overflow its banks and bring also tides of mosquitoes which bring ever more disease. There's tell of when the bodies of the dead were stacked at the river's edge because burying them only guarantees they'll rise again with the groundwater. Hence all the crypts: you've seen the pictures, you've seen the movies. You can't bury bodies in New Orleans, and yet they often have so many to bury.

All of which you can sort of feel it: it seeps into the imagination as much as might into your shoes, that you're always about to be subsumed, that your time on this firm plane is but for a time, that your time in this firmament: it's but for a time.

So, you should enjoy yourself, which can only really be done in enjoying one another.

New Orleans felt to me like a parade of humanity. There's no dominant culture there because first there were the Choctaw, and then there were the French and the White Canadians and the enslaved Black people, and then came the Spanish, who came again with greater force, and then came the Americans of English type, who bought it but who never quite owned it culturally. For all this, it seemed to me a parade of humanity, where everyone had made a work of art of themselves and was out presenting themselves to others whereupon received, a mutual self-giving and other-receiving, positively Trinitarian in the mutual giving and receiving of Being that felt en force.

And I know, I was on vacation. I had on the rose-colored glasses of vacation. But it all felt eschatological to me. Not merely apocalyptic, which is the revealing of the terrible fact of the temporary which shall surely fall away, but eschatological, which is the promising fact of an eternal and enduring joy that is the new creation beyond this old one—which is also, we must remember, beautiful and beloved and good. Its falling away is cause for grief, for sorrow, even for fear. But the loss of it is not the loss of us, and it is not loss of love, which is so powerful a force as never to let us go. Beyond the apocalyptic is the eschaton, a world of celebration, of mutual self-giving and other-receiving, having moved through death and come out the other side.

Okay. We've had our time. We've taken the hour away from a world that seems, if not in collapse, then at least in terrible quake. We've had quiet and beauty and fellowship and a word that I hope will sustain you who are weary. Meanwhile, as we know, out there things are happening. News is making headlines that we'll go home in some dread to read.

So, take this time. Take this time out of time. Take it as a foretaste of what beauty and humanity, what sustenance and delight, await in the great hereafter that we can trust as true. Let this be its foreshadow, that we be made resilient for our move from life to Life, that we might courageous for the living of these days. Taste and see that the Lord is good, the Lord is with us, and the Lord will reign as King forever.

Thanks be to God.