

A Sermon for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany  
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*When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."*

*Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."*

*Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.*

*When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.*

*2 Kings 2:1-12*

*Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*  
*Mark 9:2-9*

At our house there was a time when our favorite toys were Transformers. If you are of a certain age you might even remember the original theme song – Transformers - more than meets the eye! These fun plastic toys look like cars or planes but when pulled and twisted they reconfigure into robots that will defeat evil and save the world. They have remained popular with children since they were created in the 1980's along with an entire cartoon series. It might be worthwhile to ponder why children love them so much. More than meets the eye.

There's something compelling about an object that appears to be one thing being transformed into something made of the same material but suddenly having more power, more capabilities, a new purpose that brings life, that saves the world. In our own lives as adults, we know something about times of transformation. Those times between what was and what will be, times of change, times when a threshold is crossed. Literally a threshold is that strip of wood on the floor in a doorway. It's the entranceway to a room or a building.

We hear about thresholds to transformation in our readings today. Both Elijah and Elisha experience transformation. Elisha must let go of his mentor, the prophet Elijah. But there is more than meets the eye going on here than simply saying goodbye. Elisha must take on the mantle of Elijah. Both prophets had a hard time acknowledging this threshold, and there were other prophets on the sidelines- shouting out opinions that kept distracting Elisha from keeping his focus. There is usually a tension in the decision to walk through an unknown doorway.

Eventually, both Elisha and Elijah crossed the threshold God presented to them. Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven, and Elisha stayed behind. It was not an easy transformation for Elisha. When he could no longer see his beloved Elijah, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. It took some time of grieving before he could take up Elijah's mantle and continue God's work. Loss and pain are very real parts of transformation.

We hear about another transformation in our gospel reading. The account of the Transfiguration is a threshold in Jesus's earthly ministry before he turns toward Jerusalem and the cross. It's also a threshold moment for the disciples as they witness Jesus transfigured before them, his clothes dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. This glimpse of a transformed Jesus, talking with the revered prophets Moses and Elijah, was overwhelming to the disciples. In this moment they saw Jesus as they knew him and also as so much more than they knew, as the glory of God overshadowed them.

When artists depict this scene, Jesus, Moses and Elijah are always standing up high surrounded by great light, while the three disciples are rolling around on the ground, legs flailing, or crouched in a tight ball of fear, with their hands covering their eyes. It's almost comical, except that we know they were terrified, because the scripture says so. Thresholds in life are not always comfortable, are they? And yet, haven't we also experienced some wonderful thresholds, some beautiful transformations?

Have you had a moment when you knew you had encountered something holy; where you encountered the Divine Presence? We have glimpses of the Holy when we experience the beauty of a particular painting or a piece of music; through moments of reconciliation or in acts of kindness. We also have glimpses of the Holy when we see a need for transformation and respond to it.

As much as we want to hold on to these experiences, like Elisha not ready to let go of Elijah, or like Peter wanting all three of the holy men to stay in dwellings on the mountain, we need to remember these moments for the gift that they are; reminders of the startling reality that God is always with us, seen and unseen; with us when we are high up on the mountain in glory and when we have come back down into everyday life. And most of all, we need to remember that these are moments when God is reaching out to transform us, calling us to cross over a threshold into a new way of being.

Life is filled with thresholds. Being born, learning to walk, to swim or ride a bike. Many of us graduate, marry, have our own children, become grandparents, and retire. These are the thresholds we expect, but there are also thresholds we don't expect.

We may not make it through school, our marriage may end in divorce, we may lose a job, or receive a medical diagnosis that changes all our plans. When we walk through these kinds of doorways, as we all do, it can be overwhelming. And yet, it's more often our challenging transformations that are the most powerful, the ones that give us new purpose in life.

Transformation does not make us into something completely different, but into more than we knew we could be, more than meets the eye. It does not always mean that what we are leaving behind is not of great value, but rather all that has gone before has prepared us for the next thing God has waiting for us.

When life pulls and twists and reconfigures us, expect a transformation. A chariot is changed into a fiery heavenly vehicle, a piece of cloth is transformed into a mantle that parts the waters, and the uncertainty of what comes next in life will be illuminated with the dazzling light of God's glory. When we allow God to transform us, we will all be more than meets the eye. Amen.