

Joel Hoffman having shared his favorite New York story last week, I thought I would share my own. After 2 years living on the Upper West Side of Manhattan going to Seminary and Grad School in Harlem, we bought a car. If I remember correctly, it was an Orange and White 1981 Horizon. Nothing fancy but for us a major purchase. Then one Sunday evening, commuting back from preaching and leading Senior High Youth Group in New Jersey, I got a flat tire. In the cold and dark of the streets of Harlem, I found the emergency tools and Spare tire in the Hatchback, jacking up the back end and removing lug nuts; when suddenly, I felt the car move? Not really move as in rolling, but the front end lifted up! I came round the car and found people taking the front wheels off my car! I shouted Hey, what are you doing? They replied: "You take care of stealing the back end, we will take the front end!"

15 years ago in her book The Great Emergence, Phyllis Tickle described that every 500 years, Humanity brings out all of the resolved ideas, as if an International Patio Sale to reconsider, What do we Believe? The Reformation was not about the creation of differing Christian denominations, those were the outcome. The Reformation attempted to rethink "What are we doing here? What do we believe? What do we believe about life, about the Church, about the Holy Spirit, about Jesus as our Savior, what do we believe about GOD?" The most basic conviction of the Reformation was that Jesus is fully Human and fully GOD.

Science and Technology have given us modern miracles! We now have the ability to go to the Moon, possibly to Mars, we can fly across the world. We have access to know so many things, many Cancers can be cured and our lives extended by decades...Movies have given us Superheroes who can fly, have Xray vision, and cannot be killed...

What do we believe about Jesus? The 1500s Church stated that Jesus possessed the full Divinity of GOD, and the full Humanity we live. Jesus was Born, was Baptized, he Ate and Drank and Laughed with friends, Jesus Wept, he was Arrested, Beaten, Suffered and Died. I fear that with our loss of mysticism, of mystery and miracle, our loss of awe, the loss of reverence and respect; that in the 20th Century we may have over-emphasized the HUMANITY of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, his care for the poor, the blind and lame and lepers, at the expense of belief in Jesus as Messiah, Savior, GOD with us.

I am delighted that according to a recent survey our Church conducted, our larger Green Valley area is radically different from the rest of Arizona and our Nation: there is overwhelming trust JESUS WAS MORE THAN A PROPHET, More than a Wise, MORAL TEACHER; AND that has increased in the last 10 years! CHRISTIANITY's GOD is a difficult concept, how can GOD be One GOD, Creator, Savior & Spirit? If Jesus is GOD with us, why does Jesus pray to God and speak of GOD as his Father? Why did Elijah defend his presence to GOD, then repeat this word-for-word to GOD the Still, Small Voice?

The Transfiguration takes the questions we pondered Christmas Eve, ratcheting them into another gear. How could ALL POWERFUL GOD become not only a human person, a vulnerable dependent newborn? NOW questioning IF THE PURPOSE was that the IMMORTAL GOD, would/could DIE? Not simply to DIE; to SACRIFICE that LIFE that THE CREATOR CREATES for our souls!

SECOND, Both of our Scriptures this day are about confronting our FEARS.

Jesus was afraid of what he was called to be and do, so went up the Mountain with Peter, James and John, when confronted with Moses and Elijah; coming down the Mountain to journey to his CROSS. Simon Peter, James and John are so filled with fear at witnessing Jesus TRANSFIGURED that the Gospel records PETER did not know what to say.

Confronting the transition, of this Church working with me without the Safety Net, without the Training Wheels or Guard Rails of having an ASSOCIATE PASTOR, I have been Surprisingly been spiritually fed over and over again by going to the Hospital! That is not a usual occurrence for a Pastor. There are

times when my going to the Hospital is like THE ANGEL OF DEATH. Instead this has been FAITH-HEALING. We had a friend told by the Cardiologist there was nothing more could be done for this person; A man who had Kidney failure and repeated Infections called saying He is not going to go home; another man who was told he had Stage 4 Lung Cancer and had 3 months to live. That is a lot of fear... However, the Heart Patient went back to her doctor with a series of questions, clarifying the Doctor said "Oh, by saying there was nothing could be done, what I meant was your heart valves do not need stints! The man with Kidney Failure was told, "It was not an Infection after all, you are dehydrated!" The one told he had Lung Cancer was told by a Pulmonologist that instead of Lung Cancer, he actually had Valley Fever!" None of which remove the problem or need for intentional life, which however, radically change the fear.

The TRANSMUTATION of our LORD happens at a particular moment in the story. Jesus had been teaching and preaching, healing and exorcizing spirits, when one day he asked the Disciples "Who do people say that I am?" Some respond that he is like Elijah, or Moses or John the Baptist, and Simon the Fisherman makes the leap of faith that Jesus is the Christ! The Messiah! Which like a knee-jerk reaction causes Jesus to reply, "YES, and the Messiah must be arrested, suffer and die." That is the turning point in the whole of his life. From here on, Jesus is headed to Jerusalem where he will be Crucified and Resurrected. In confirmation of Simon Peter's realization, and Jesus acceptance that he is going to his death for the world, we have the TRANSMUTATION. This is a HOLY MOMENT, a Mystical, Sacred Mountaintop, where Jesus is in communion with GOD, with Moses and Elijah. In that moment, he is changed: just as in MARK's Baptism Jesus was a Man/ who now was Baptized; prior to Transmutation Jesus was Unrecognized/ now is the Messiah on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus' Baptism// the Transmutation// and the Crucifixion -- all are united as SPIRITUAL CRESCENDOS when GOD speaks to Jesus from Heaven.

In Ancient Israel, after Saul, David and Solomon, there were a series of corrupt Kings, perhaps few so evil as King Ahab and his Jezebel. Things got so bad, that the Prophet Elijah demands a CONTEST between all the 450 Prophets of the Babylonian IDOL BAAL, versus GOD Almighty. It is a fabulous story, of every one of the Baal Priests sacrificing their own choice of a BULL, then whipping and beating themselves to get the attention of their God to receive their Offerings, when nothing happened. Then Elijah sacrifices the Bull which they have left, he has 12 Buckets of water poured over the Offering, when Elijah prays simply that GOD would prove to Israel their need to return to Faith. INSTANTLY a Lightning bolt comes out of Heaven to consume the Offering, and The Prophet Elijah goes on to sacrifice all 450 of the Priests of BAAL. When the slaughter is over, and Elijah has won, Jezebel threatens, that she will kill Elijah in the same way. SO Elijah runs away, runs for 40 Nights and 40 Days to ANSWER HIS FEARS seeking proof of GOD...He Contested before all Israel, GOD demonstrated GOD's FIDELITY & POWER; yet Elijah demands proof.

The wording here is important, because Elijah repeatedly says I have been very ZEALOUS FOR the LORD; however, Hebrew does not have Prepositions like the word FOR or OF and our Letter Z could also be a J, so what Elijah could have been saying "I HAVE BEEN VERY JEALOUS OF THE LORD!"

Elijah is afraid of the Power he has within him, and demands proof of the existence of GOD.

FIRST, Elijah witnesses EARTH, WIND & FIRE (Not the Vocal Group), Yet even though the Earth quakes and moves, even though the Rocks are split by WIND, even though the words Fire & Wind can be HOLY SPIRIT, here GOD is NOT IN the Earthquake, Wind or Fire. Then, Elijah hears a STILL, SMALL VOICE. Think not that this is a soothing comfort, a mother's voice while she rubs your back. The STILL, SMALL VOICE is a Frightening Deafening Silence, where Elijah's own words come back to confront him. Then GOD says "I still have 7000 believers in Israel, who never bent their knee or kissed the Idol of BAAL. Go back the way you came and anoint Priests and Kings in Syria, Priests and Kings in Israel, Priests and Kings in the nation

of Judah; then, after all that, find my servant Elisha, and ordain him to carry on after you.” What was the first thing Elijah did, he found Elisha to take over the job.

There is one other important symbol in the stories of ELIJAH. At the end of his life, the day Elijah is to be taken up to Heaven, Elisha accompanies him to every Altar, eventually crossing over the Jordan. When what comes to take Elijah to Heaven? The Babylonian Symbol in their IDOL OF BAAL, was always riding in a Flaming Chariot across the Heavens... So Elijah displaced BAAL and is carried up to Heaven on a Whirlwind in a Flaming Chariot.