

The following is a response to the passage of scripture (“Reverb”) for Transfiguration Sunday that I read to my spiritual community, [Church of the Apostles](#) (COTA) at the Fremont Abbey in Seattle, on 2/11/24. COTA is a joint Lutheran/Episcopalian ministry by and for the community, is an open & affirming congregation for LGBTQ+ people, and a collaborative and creative congregation. (See below for notes and references.)

[Mark 9:2-9](#)

9:2 Six days later, 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,

9:3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

9:4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

9:5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three **dwelling**s, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

9:6 He did not know what to say, for they were **terrified**.

9:7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; **listen** to him!"

9:8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9:9 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.

Transfiguration Sunday: A Reverb

I am building a dwelling.

Literally. In my yard, I am building a dwelling.

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I looked up “transfiguration”, and it’s a change in form or appearance; an exalting, glorifying, or *spiritual* change.

What does “spiritual” even mean? What is spirit? What makes a transition or change a *spiritual* one?

I think the spirit is where the heavens meet the earth; the mountain. Where the human meets the divine. where the veil grows thin. Where we sense our connection to all things; to god, the universe, to divine love and freedom; where we can face our terror and still be safe, to know that we are okay.

This is where we are called to stay. “Listen,” the voice says. Listen. This is what we need to hear, yet cannot fully understand; this is what we need to see, yet cannot hold onto. It is ephemeral, mysterious, wild, incalculable, brave, bold, free; this is where we can let go, and be held by the mystery that is divine presence.

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A spiritual change can happen anywhere, any time, to anyone. A spiritual transition could be a pregnancy, a birth, a new job, a new school, following a dream, climbing a mountain, running a marathon, allowing a new relationship into your life, being vulnerable with yourself or others, creating art, making music, connecting with others, sharing a secret, forging a new path, writing a book, going for a walk and noticing the cracks in the pavement or a flower swaying in the wind. It is mystery, it is noticing. It is listening. It is a moment, and it is a lifetime.

This is the transfiguration: around us, and within us, and between us. Threes. The place where monsters merge with angels, and our wildest imaginings are real, and holy, and given as gifts of magic.

Is the transfiguration of Jesus something that occurred only to Jesus, or to Peter and the disciples? Did god herself experience this moment? Is it about one or both or all of them? Yes. It is about everything being true at once: Moses and Elijah and Jesus, both here with us, and not here. It is about a journey, there and back. What do we do with this overwhelming gift of experiencing the mystery, terror, and awe of a transfiguration – in ourselves or others?

We build a dwelling for it, in our hearts, in our minds, on paper, or in our own backyard. On the mountain where it happened, or in whatever space we have for contemplation and care. To share with others, and to sit alone in silence. We contemplate the mysteries of birth, death, rebirth; the temporal and ephemeral; the metamorphosis; we honor the transition that harkens back to our baptism and presages the resurrection. We dwell here, now.

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Peter witnessed the **transfiguration** of Jesus; a complete spiritual transformation, an apocryphal, beautiful, incomprehensible, and ephemeral metamorphosis; and he was terrified. But he didn't run away. He said Rabbi, it is good to be here. Let us make three dwellings: one for you, one for moses, and one for elijah.

Always in threes, right? the father, son, and holy ghost; jesus, moses, and elijah; the baptism, the transfiguration, and the crucifixion. There's this sacred and mysterious *balance* in the number three, and it shows up a lot in nature, and in principles of artmaking, too.

Some of you may know that I am currently working on an MFA; a master's degree in fine art, in interdisciplinary art and writing.

This process, for me, of going back to school, of being able to connect with others who share my passion for art and creativity and community, is absolutely transformative for me. And it is a spiritual change, because it is so vulnerable, and so raw, and so real. It requires me to show up as my full self, and it changes me in ways I can't fully understand. And art, for me – all arts—are mysterious to me, because of this.

And at the same time as I started grad school, I became a parent for the first time, and I experienced birthing a child, and everything – literally everything about my life, my identity, my body, my brain, my social interactions, my spirit and my spiritual life has changed.

As I enter into my final year of my MFA program, I am starting work on my final project, which is called “Matrescence: becoming mother nature.” It's an installation project that I'm building outdoors, out of mostly recycled materials like cardboard, and I'll document the creation and deterioration of it over the course of this year. And it starts with building a frame – the outline of a structure, open to the elements, literally holding space for myself and creating a space of rest and contemplation.

This thing that I'm building, it's about reckoning with birth, change, transition, metamorphosis, transformation (which ALL of us go through, at one time or another, or many times over), and it's about **rest**. Bearing witness to something extraordinary, and yes, even terrifying, and taking the time to pause and dwell in it.

And in that rest, something else happens, too – a letting go. A trust that god, who is mother nature, will take care of us. And it's a caring for her, too: to stay present, to witness, and to honor the sacrifices of god, and the earth. We are able to be still, perhaps, for a little while, to mark these seismic, *spiritual* moments of change, in this specific time and place.

So I am making a dwelling. In my yard.

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I was grateful to be reminded by a classmate recently of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, wherein people build a Sukkah, a temporary shelter made of natural materials, to “dwell” in for a week of celebrations. This is to commemorate the time god provided for the Israelites in the wilderness after they were freed from slavery, and it is a symbolic structure that celebrates “the fragility and transience of life, and one's dependence on god” (to quote from Wikipedia). What I am building, she said, is in many ways similar to a Sukkah: a temporary dwelling, a symbolic ritual. The

Sukkah is also a place of spiritual mystery, and of celebration and sharing space with others. (My childhood best friend is Jewish, and I remember her inviting me into her family's Sukkah in their yard.)

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As many of us have, I have experienced a transfiguration of my body, and my life, and I am so grateful to spirit for providing for me and leading me through this wilderness. And in response, I get to transfigure this space that I have been given, and share it with others.

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And this beautiful thing that I envision is not going to last forever. Thinking and working in this medium where *time* and *nature* are integral elements has allowed me to embrace deterioration and death as a part of life and art; for everything new, there is also a letting go of the old. I create to mark these times of transformation, and then before my eyes, my creations vanish. And now I'm thinking of what happens in this passage – Moses and Elijah disappear again, (Jesus presumably goes back to not shining with light,) but God's voice comes in, and says, "Listen." Something important has happened, will happen, is happening.

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I am drawn to the **mystery** of the transfiguration of Jesus, and to mystery in general. When I follow the mystery of life, nature, God, self, community; when I listen and respond to that call; I see amazing things happen. I feel peace. I feel terror and awe. I feel joy.

I have to tell you, I was terrified to do this, to stand up here and speak. I told this to a friend of mine and she basically said, if God is with me, then what do I have to be scared of? ...I don't know! To be terrified is human. **To be terrified, and to show up and do it anyway – that is where the human meets the divine.** That is the mystery, and that is how we are transfigured.

As we celebrate this festival of the transfiguration, I invite you to think about what moments of awe and wonder, or maybe even something that terrifies you, that you feel moved to sit with in your life lately. Is there a way, figuratively or maybe even literally, physically, to mark out space to sit with it? A way to set up camp and stay there a while? As Peter says, "it is good for us to be here." Together.

—Alexia Casiano, Seattle, 2/11/24

References:

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Trans·fig·u·ra·tion

/tran(t)s,figyə'rāSH(ə)n/

noun

a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state:

"in this light the junk undergoes a transfiguration; it shines"

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukkah>

A **sukkah** or **succah** (/ˈsʊkə/; Hebrew: סוכה [suˈka]; plural, סוכות [suˈkot] *sukkot* or *sukkos* or *sukkoth*, often translated as "booth") is a temporary hut constructed for use during the week-long Jewish festival of **Sukkot**. It is topped with branches and often well decorated with autumnal, harvest or Judaic themes. The book of Vayikra (**Leviticus**) describes it as **a symbolic wilderness shelter, commemorating the time God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness they inhabited after they were freed from slavery in Egypt.**^[1] It is common for Jews to eat, sleep and otherwise spend time in the *sukkah*. In Judaism, Sukkot is considered a joyous occasion and is referred to in Hebrew as *Z'man Simchateinu* (the time of our rejoicing), and **the sukka*h* itself symbolizes the fragility and transience of life and one's dependence on God.**^[2]