

## Overshadowed by God's Presence

*By Linda Rex*

**February 27, 2022, TRANSFIGURATION**—One of the interesting things I have found to be true for me about life transitions is that it motivates me to go deeper in my relationship with God. I begin to be more intentional about spending time both talking to God but also listening to what he has to say to me.

Recently I was told that I have high-risk melanoma which is spreading, and I am going through the tedious and complicated process of discovering how bad the cancer is and what my treatment will be. This process, along with the recent changes in my church and job status, have been reminding me how important it is to stay connected with God, both by speaking with him and listening to him. How do I deal with all that is on my plate right now? I can only do it “in Christ.” Otherwise, it is more than I can bear.

What I am going through really is no different than what many humans go through and have gone through throughout the centuries. God often meets us in the midst of our difficulties and draws us even closer to himself. He does not mean any of these things for our harm, but seeks to work them for our good, as we trust in him. The struggle is the trusting in the midst of the not knowing and the intense challenges we face, especially when we are facing great loss or death.

This Sunday we celebrate the transfiguration of Jesus, a time when for a few moments Peter, James, and John saw beneath the humanity of Jesus into the glorious divinity of his Person. In that divine moment, they saw a glimpse of the kingdom of God in glorious splendor in the face and clothing of Jesus. They saw him speaking with the dead men, Moses and Elijah, and were overcome by the significance of the moment. As Peter was suggesting the building of three tabernacles, a cloud overshadowed them and they heard a voice saying to them, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”

This is the struggle these men had. So often they found themselves telling Jesus what he should and should not do. They could not simply allow Jesus to be the Savior he was—the Suffering Servant Messiah who would take away the sins of the world by his suffering sacrifice on the cross. Remember what happened when Peter said he knew Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and then when Jesus told them about his upcoming betrayal and crucifixion? Peter tried to convince Jesus he didn't know what he was talking about—that it wouldn't happen. And Jesus told him, “Get behind me, Satan. You care more for the things of men than the things of God.”

This is really our struggle as human beings. We want God to guide us and direct us. But we certainly don't appreciate it when God asks of us things we don't want to do. And we don't like it when God takes us down the road he took his Son Jesus down—the path to death and resurrection. That's when life gets difficult and uncomfortable, and we don't have control over the outcome. The path of the crucifixion of our flesh is hard, but a necessary task that Jesus took on in our place and on our behalf. When we go through difficulties and struggles in this life, we participate in his suffering and death. But ultimately, the purpose is to enable us to participate in the new life which is ours in him.

This brings me back to the importance of what the men experienced upon the mountain when they saw a glimpse of Jesus' glory. The overshadowing presence of God was real, and they were frightened by it. Jesus was living in union and communion with the Father in the Spirit, so to him it was a welcome experience. How joyfully he must have appreciated the encouragement of the Father in that moment! But for the disciples, it was frightening.

If the disciples had understood more fully the love and grace of God present right there in that moment in Jesus Christ, perhaps the overshadowing presence of God would not have been as frightening to them. What if they themselves had had a relationship with God that was close and affectionate? Wouldn't their response have been different?

And the voice they heard told them to listen to Jesus. Here was the Prophet foretold by Moses that they were to listen to and heed. What these disciples needed to do was take seriously the command from God to listen to and obey Jesus—to follow where he was leading them, to death and resurrection. His “exodus” from this life was essential to their salvation and ours. More important than the building of tabernacles was the building of their faith in Jesus Christ. They needed to place their trust in him and in what he was intending to do on behalf of all humanity in his upcoming sacrificial death and resurrection.

In the same way, today we need to take seriously the reality of what Christ did for us in his sacrificial offering and in the giving of the Spirit by which God comes to dwell in human hearts. We need to embrace the reality that God's presence is near to each of us, overshadowing us by the Spirit and drawing us near. And we do not need to be afraid or anxious as God draws near to us and draws us to himself.

God is present and real by the Spirit, and is calling us into intimate relationship with himself through Jesus. He wants us to catch a glimpse of the glory that is ours, which he forged within our humanity in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. He wants us to embrace the gift he has given us of life in him by the Spirit—sharing in the union and communion with the Father he dwells and invites us into. He wants us to be filled with the Spirit, not with the things of this life. He wants us to be led by the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit—to live life moment by moment in the Spirit, aware of his presence and joyfully experiencing a tangible relationship with God that involves both speaking and listening to the One who calls us his beloved child.

We were created to love God and love one another, to live life in healthy, holy relationship. We were created to reflect the glory of God as image-bearers of the divine One. What better way to grow up in being Christlike than by growing in our intimate relationship with God through listening to and speaking with the One who made us and redeemed us. What is God saying to you and to me today? Are we listening to and actually acting on the things he is saying to us?

*Thank you, Father, for including us in your relationship with your Son in the Spirit. Thank you for loving us so completely that you want to share your life with us now and forever. Grant us the grace to hear what you say and to obey, and to simply trust in your love and grace expressed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*“Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah’—not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!’ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.” Luke 9:28–36 NASB*