

Last Sunday in Epiphany  
Transfiguration Sunday YB 2024

## **Dwelling with What Terrifies**

By the Rev. Salying Wong

I like to tell this story, about flipping through People's Magazine at my dentist office and finding the results of a survey on, "What do people fear most?" Number 3 was public speaking; number 2 was death; and number 1 was the unknown. From this I surmised that people would rather die than face uncertainty. This makes me wonder, "What moves us beyond our fears?" How do we gain the courage to speak in public, welcome death when it comes, and, most of all, embrace change and walk into the unknown? It seems to me it must have something to do with the attraction of love toward love. This attraction is like a hand to hold in the midst of the uncertainty that terrifies us and gives us courage to outlast our fears.

Today, we stand at a threshold, with the Season of Epiphany behind us and Lent in front of us. Today we stand on the mountain of transfiguration, with Jesus, Moses, Elijah, James, John—and the most interesting Peter. Prior to climbing the mountain, Jesus told his disciples that he was to be tortured and crucified, and on the third day rise again. Think about it. Imagine if this is the first you've heard of it, that the teacher you've been following, the one who's been impressing you with his acts of power, curing the sick, casting out demons, teaching curious parables—all his power and fame will disappear with humiliation, torture and crucifixion. You've seen those bodies hung on poles every time you walked into a new city in the Empire. It is no wonder Peter said, "God forbid!" Now that you know, what new feelings do you carry? Did you sign up for this? Would you be building your exit plan about now?

As the disciples walked up the mountain, the heaviest weight they carried was their fear of the unknown. Now, Jesus has them up there to give them another

kind of fear. Standing in their midst, the veil between human and divine was pulled back from Jesus and he shines like the sun; his clothes, his hair, his skin become dazzling white. He is not alone, the representative of the Law, Moses, and the representative of the prophets, Elijah, appear with Jesus, speaking with him. What might have they said to one another? Did Moses nod in the direction of the disciples and recalled the Israelites' fear when he shone and how he had to veil himself? Did Elijah talk about his own fear when Jezebel wanted to kill him and how it was the silence rather than the tempest that he ended up trusting?

The light and the vision terrified the disciples. But this was a different kind of terror than what they carried onto the mountain. It was another kind of uncertainty—an uncertainty that comes with beholding God. They did not see the light and say, “Oh, good, it will all turn out okay. Or, everything happens for a reason.” No bromides on the mount of transfiguration. Here they felt the inner draw to move toward something way beyond their comprehension and ability to control. Not knowing what to say, but feeling the inner attraction, Peter wondered how to dwell here rather in that other terror. He will realize that he cannot control this experience anymore than the unknown. But, God gave them the secret on how to abide here, in this place, when they feel overwhelmed by the terror that is below the mountain. A voice proclaimed, “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.” Listen to him.

As we crossover to Lent, let us ponder this message, “Listen to him”. It is a hard road to walk, as human beings in this world, with all its vagaries, suffering and uncertainty. It is easy to be so burdened by this. These burdens have their own power to possess us, to grip us in fear. But they are dispossessed of their power, not by us outsmarting our fears or making a better plan, but in our practice of listening to the One who draws us toward Them by love. Our uncertainty is not made certain, but we can bear with all its pain because we are not abandoned. It is time to come down the mountain, but we can always find our dwelling place with God whenever we stop to “listen to him.”