

## ***“Shine Jesus Shine”***

February 26, 2017



The vision of Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain has its origins in Mark's version of the story of Jesus.

Mark's Gospel ends as the women run away in fear from the empty tomb, as if they haven't even heard the assurances the young man in white gives them,

*“Go! Tell the disciples that, as he promised, Jesus will be meeting with them in Galilee.”*



*“They were frightened out of their wits,” Mark tells us... “And they said nothing to anybody, because they were afraid.”*

There are no resurrection appearances in Mark, except for those that are awkwardly ‘tacked on’ by later editors of the Christian New Testament.

Mark's young man in white has made it clear that they will meet him back home in Galilee, the very place they were first called by Jesus.

*“Come! I will make you fishers of people.”*

*“And yet,” writes Mark, “they say nothing to anybody.” Why? “Because they are frightened out of their wits.”*

When Mark puts the same young man in white in the very centre of his version of the Gospel, that is his ‘depiction’ of the post-Easter Jesus.

As we'll see later - when Matthew edits Mark's story into his version of the Transfiguration - we can find evidence of Matthew's awareness of Mark's agenda.

So, let's have a look at Matthew's take on the Jesus story:  
and let's begin where Peter responds to Jesus' challenge,

*"But you, who do you say that I am?"* with his bold confession, *"You are the Messiah, Son of the living God,"*

Jesus ends this momentous day with the enigmatic promise:

*"There are some standing here, who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

Six days later he takes them up a high mountain;  
Peter and James and James' brother John, that is.

*"Transfigured before them, his face shone bright as the sun. His clothing became dazzling white."*

There is nothing in Mark's story about  
Jesus' face shining, *"bright as the sun."*



Then - just as in Mark - Moses & Elijah appear and converse with Jesus. Transported by what he's seen, Peter wanted to capture it... to fence in the moment.

*"Lord!!! It is so good for us to be here. If you wish, I'll make three dwellings - one for you... one for Moses... and one for Elijah."*

Here is where Matthew departs significantly from Mark, having Peter address Jesus, *"Lord,"* instead of, *"Rabbi."*

The early church had a simple three-word confession:

*"Jesus is Lord!"* opposed to, *"Caesar is Lord!"*

Unlike Rabbi, or Teacher, it wouldn't have been used to address the historical Jesus.

Epiphany! Aha moment! This is the post-Easter Christ!

PAUSE

*"While he was speaking,"* Matthew continues, *"suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them."*

Here Matthew throws in the word, *"bright."*  
Is he tying the voice that will speak from it  
to Jesus' face, *"shining bright like the sun?"*

Not only is this the risen Christ,  
he has become "one with" God.

Then - the most important change of all -  
Matthew arranges the telling to reposition  
the disciples terror.... Instead of resulting  
from what they see, it is from what they hear.

*"This is my Son, the beloved with whom I am well pleased. Pay attention to him."*

*"When the disciples hear this,"* Matthew tells us, *"They are overcome with fear."*

For Mark, the appearance of Jesus terrifies them  
In Luke it is when they are enveloped by a cloud,  
but in Matthew it is not until they hear God speak.

What if by 85 CE, when Matthew pens his Gospel,  
somehow God & Jesus are now one and the same?

Matthew also changes the Greek, such that  
rather than terror, it becomes awesome fear.

*"Fear of Yahweh, the nexus of wisdom."*

Jesus touches the disciples to reassure them,

*“Arise, and be not afraid. Be not afraid.  
Awe, Fear... OK... but don’t be afraid.”*

When does the healthy, awesome fear of God  
go over the edge such that it immobilizes us?

PAUSE

I remember one Sunday afternoon, 25 years ago, on the farm.

One of the cats had brought in a live mouse.  
Rather than killing it, she was playing with it,  
tossing it in the air... chasing it... catching it,  
over, and over again, a game of cat and mouse.



I heard a commotion behind me;  
and it was our daughter - Lizzie -  
climbing on top of a kitchen chair,  
both arms waving about in the air,  
and “screeching” to beat the band.

Assuming the obvious - her fear of the mouse -  
Sue turned to her with words of encouragement.

Liz dropped her arms... and started to laugh,  
*“I’ve always wanted to do that,”* she chuckled.

PAUSE

Most of us see mice as being more of a pest,  
than as something that evokes “terror” in us.  
But - if you are afraid - don’t be embarrassed,  
I hear it’s true of elephants too, big as they are.

Terror is not the response Jesus encourages.

Fear, awe, whatever... must not become terror.

Terror makes us shy away from following Jesus.

A healthy, awesome fear lets us arise, and follow.



Matthew’s Gospel gradually reveals  
this to his listeners starting with the  
angel’s conversation with Joseph:

*“Don’t be afraid to take Mary  
as your wife, for what is con-  
ceived within her is of God.”*

Frightened by a storm, the  
disciples waken Jesus, who  
calms the sea, saying,

Notice, Jesus doesn’t say,  
*“You faithless fools,”*

*Why so af-  
raid, you of  
little faith?*



He encourages them to use that “pinch of faith” to dispel  
their fear, what they already used awakening him for help.

*“As you trust me, so you can trust in God.”*

When he instructs the disciples about confrontations  
they will have with all those who oppose their mission,  
and they tell Jesus they fear for their lives, he responds

*“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body,  
but can’t kill the soul. Rather, fear the evil  
powers that spiral body & soul down to hell.  
You buy two sparrows for a penny... yet not  
one falls from the sky but the Father knows.  
I’m telling you, there’s no need to be afraid,  
for you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

Later, they see Jesus approach them on the water.  
Terrified, they cry out in fear, and Jesus responds:

*“Have courage! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.”*

Peter, bold as ever, jumps overboard, and walks toward Jesus on the water; the wind blows the spume into his face, and, realizing his folly, he starts to sink.



Jesus reaches for his hand to hold him: *“You, of little faith, why do you doubt; this ‘pinch of leaven’ worth of faith that let you water - walk toward me, why not use it to stay the course?”*

Matthew edits Mark’s story of the women at the tomb:  
The earth shakes, the stone is rolled away by an angel, with a face as bright as lightning, a robe white as snow.

Ahaa... we have seen that young man before.

When they see the angel sitting on the stone, the Guards are terrified, and the angel speaks:

*There’s no need for you to be afraid.*

addressing the women and advising them that



*Jesus is not here. He is risen, as he said. Go, tell his disciples he’s gone ahead to Galilee. That’s where you will see him. It’s true!”*

Matthew tells us that, *“Filled with awe and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples.”* Not fear, but awe & joy.

Filled with awe and great joy, they shine (as Jesus shone), and - surprise, surprise - they encountered him on the way.

They fall to the ground once more, paying homage, and Jesus reassures them as had the other man in white,

*Don’t be afraid. Get up! Go to the others; they must leave for Galilee; there they will see me.*

The same word, *“Arise!”* Jesus said to the disciples on the mountaintop, he says to us, *“Be not afraid! Arise!”* *“Rise and shine,”* the early morning call to awaken, get up, get out there:



Get on with living, not timidly, shading our candlelight, but brightly... in a world, desperate for luminescence.

*“Say nothing about this ‘til after I’ve risen,”*

He has to say that, eh, ‘cause he hasn’t died yet.

After the disciples had been reassured by Jesus, they arose and left the Mountain Top to return to a 24-7 commission to walk with Jesus in Galilee.

The mountain top experiences of Sunday Morning and other Epiphanies - bright angel lights in white - that God provides for us... are meant to inspire us, not so much to tell the story as to shine, be the light, in our lives as individuals, families and communities.

As Jesus brought heaven’s light to earth... so we shine:  
May your realm glisten, O God, here as in heaven... Amen.