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Weekend of Sunday, February 14, 2021
Transfiguration/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B
First Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-12
Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6
Gospel Reading: Mark 9:2-9
Sermon Title: "Reflecting the Light of Christ"

Theme

The Sundays after Epiphany began with Jesus' baptism and end with three disciples' vision of his transfiguration. In Mark's story of Jesus' baptism, apparently only Jesus sees the Spirit descending and hears the words from heaven. But now Jesus' three closest friends hear the same words naming him God's Beloved. As believers, Paul writes, we are enabled to see the God-light in Jesus' face, because the same God who created light in the first place has shone in our hearts to give us that vision. The light of God's glory in Jesus has enlightened us through baptism and shines in us also for others to see.

Text

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Sermon

There is an interesting theme that runs through scripture that when one encounters the Holy, that one is changed and often in dramatic physical ways.

Maybe you will recall that after Moses communed with the LORD on the top of Mount Sinai and returned to the Israelites at the bottom of the mountain, they didn't even recognize him because "his face shone because he had been talking with God." And "they were afraid to come near him" (Exodus 34:29-30). The Israelites asked him to wear a veil over his face to protect themselves from his brilliance.

When Zechariah the priest questioned Gabriel, the angel of the LORD, about the announcement that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son, the angel rendered him speechless until his son John was born.

And then in the Gospel Reading, in the story of the mysterious event of the Transfiguration, two figures, Elijah and Moses, just appeared with Jesus, and the entire being of Jesus became "dazzling white" according to the apostle Mark.

There are other such stories but those three jumped into my head on this day as we celebrate the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Speaking only for myself, but I hope for you too, I have had several of those moments when I had an encounter with the Holy to some degree. The moments are usually short-lived, but the impact can be powerful and last a long time, powerful enough to drive someone into ministry.

In my nearly 24 years of ordained ministry I have preached on the Transfiguration many times and most of those times I have focused on how Jesus was changed before the eyes of the disciples and what it must have meant and so on. And that is a safe direction to go because, as my homiletics professor taught, it's all about Jesus.

But how about we take a look at this story from another perspective. First, how the encounter with the transfigured Jesus impacted the disciples; and second, how an encounter, whether it has happened, or is still to happen, has or should impact you and me.

About the disciples, the Gospel Reading tells us what happened at that moment. Moments later, Jesus and the three were coming down the mountain, and he told

them to keep the matter to themselves until after he had *risen from the dead*. Though they didn't understand what they had witnessed, and they certainly did not understand the comment about *rising from the dead*, they knew that had experienced something special, an encounter with the Holy.

If you read on past this event in the Gospel of Mark you will find that the preaching and teaching and signs and miracles kept going on, and if you turn the page again to Chapter 11, Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem where he will meet his demise. But that would not be the end of his story would it, or we wouldn't be here. Jesus rose from the dead thereby claiming victory over sin and death and opening the gate to eternal life closed by sin. Eleven of the twelve lived to witness it and were given the Holy Spirit and that propelled them into the world as *apostles* – the Greek word for apostle is:

Apostle – Απόστολος ~ (apóstolos) – "one who is sent; an emissary"

Later, after the Resurrection, they had another encounter with the Holy at Pentecost, the *disciples*, now *apostles* were sent off as emissaries of the Good News of Jesus Christ because they were convinced that nothing was more important than transmitting that message, nothing more important that they could do with their lives.

Though not one of the original disciples or one of the original eleven apostles, the apostle Paul had an encounter with the Holy that Luke recorded as a light from heaven flashing all around that him that knocked him off his feet and left him blind. And while lying on the ground, Paul heard the disembodied voice of one who identified himself as the resurrected Jesus Christ, asking him why he was persecuting him. Yea, that will get one's attention.

Speaking of Paul, the persecutor and convert to an apostle, he is the author of our Second Reading to the Corinthians, in which he wrote that the light of the glory of Christ shines into the heart of the believer, and the believer is to let it shine out into the darkness of this world, so that others may see the light of the Gospel which is the glory of Christ, the image of God. I will come back to this.

Let's move on to us, shall we? Allow me to speak for you all. Some of us have probably had a dramatic encounter with the Holy. Maybe not like Paul's, but something frightening and at the same time comforting because we knew it was of God.

Others of us have just been given enough to keep us interested in being disciples. I think this is pretty common because God wants us to keep leaning in so that we can hear God's still small voice.

And there are probably still others of us who wish something like this would happen to us because it would affirm what we believe in faith. To all of us, I say great! We are the *unveiled* that Paul wrote about. The ones who are not blinded by the darkness, the hopelessness, the futility of this world.

If God did indeed create us in God's image, then there is probably a myriad of ways to experience an encounter with the Holy, and isn't that just like our God to reach us just as we need to be reached?

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

To you and to myself I say, we have the light of the glory of Christ shining in our hearts. But that glory in us is not for us and us alone. Paul wrote that we are to let it shine out into the darkness of this world.

Some of you are good at this. You do this in subtle ways, like teaching Sunday School, or playing in the bell choir, or distributing food, or sweeping the streets of Cornersburg. Others of you are more demonstrative. You literally tell others of the love of Jesus that has brought you this far, and you trust that it will take you home.

To all of you, I say, "Great! Let the light of the glory of Christ shine out of your hearts."

But it has always been my experience that there are others who have never felt what I am talking about, have never had that sense of the indwelling of the Spirit. If this describes you, then I offer this demonstration.

Let's say this spotlight is the light of the glory of Christ. The light is on me, and suddenly I am literally in the spotlight. In the generosity of God, I could do nothing

with it, and maybe it will warm my heart – given enough time. I can feel the love of Jesus in my heart and it feels wonderful.

But if I pull up this mirror, that represents the light of the glory of Christ shining out of my heart, others may come to me and say, “Hey, tell me about that glory shining out of your heart.” Then I can tell them about what compels me to do the activity I am doing (leading worship, distributing food, teaching Sunday school, etc.) and the love of Jesus that compels me to do it. The light of the glory of Christ reflects off me and shines into the darkness of the world and illumines the hearts of others with the glory of Christ I have received.

Those of you who pretty much know what I’m talking about get what I am trying to say. But if you don’t get it, but want to get it, I’ll show you whom I see the light of the glory of Christ reflecting off of, and you can go serve next to them, and you will see what I mean. Try it and you will experience what it means to be helpful, hopeful, and useful to God revealed in Jesus Christ, and you will be blessed.

Prayer

Our Lord Jesus, how we long to experience what you experienced on that mountain top – the clear presence of the indwelling of your Spirit in our hearts. Lead us and guide us to the work of discipleship through which we experience the light of your glory shining into our hearts, and shining out into the darkness of this world. We pray this in your name. Amen