

The Last Sunday of the Epiphany February 7, 2016. Exodus 34:29-35 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2  
Luke 9:28-43a St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland WA Nigel Taber-Hamilton

It's the Last Sunday of Epiphany Season. Today it's all supposed to come together, this season we call "Epiphany." After all, the word means "Revealing!" So after weeks of hints— a star, a dove, 180 gallons of the best wine— today we stand at the end, in full sunlight, basking in the Beloved's glory. Today we hear the very voice of God. So today is a "White" day. White Days are days for exceptional celebration and today is no exception – dazzling whiteness, glory, radiance, shining, brightness. As the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: "***The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out like shining from shook foil; it gathers to a greatness like the ooze of oil Crushed.***" The transfiguration shouts loudly that nature is not spent, the energy of the big bang surges through us, we are stardust, energetic and lively; all the readings say so!

Moses encountered God and his face shined. It was too much to bear, the reflected glory of God, so the leader had to hide his face. He hid his light under a bushel basket so the dim consciousness of his fellow believers could tolerate it! Do we hide our light? Do we focus on small things just so our neighbors won't notice, envy, or critique us?

In God's light, we see light, the Psalmist proclaims.

Paul proclaims the bright power of the Spirit, shining from within us.

Jesus goes up onto a mountain and his face shines in radiant divinity; with Moses and Elijah, trinity of light bearers and light sharers.

The energy is inescapable! Do we have that energy? On a day like today, do we glow with God's energy and light?

And the "we" in that question is central. Read today's gospel and it becomes obvious that Luke constructed his text with a purpose: none of the events – the incredibly bright light or the presence of the Law and Prophets symbolized by Moses and Elijah – none of those things were present for the sake of Jesus, but for the sake of the three disciples. They needed to hear from God, to know of God's ultimate presence in Jesus and thus that resistance to what Jesus was doing was resistance to what God was doing. And they – and especially Peter – needed to know that while Moses, Elijah, and Jesus all carried the word of God for God's people, only Jesus was in the words of John's Gospel, "begotten of God" (John 3:16); only Jesus was to be "listened to" (vs. 35).

Peter almost missed that, because he made the mistake of equating these three figures by offering to build shelters for all three.

But ultimately, he didn't. Ultimately, on some level, he got it. I wonder, do we? Do we get it? Can we see the Glory of God?

As I reflect particularly on the Gospel reading, it seems to me that a central lesson of this Transfiguration story is that the glory of God is only possible if we live it together, in community. Nobody, not even Jesus, could shine alone! As Moses, Elijah, and Jesus show us, only when we are together that God's radiance can we light each other's lives.

And I think this story reveals to us that we can only make sense of ourselves as a community if the people who came before us are presence in our struggle. Our ancestors in the faith come to us to give us a thick sense of the present and to say that they survived under the name of God and we can do that too.

It that's right – if glory is only possible if its shared – then it can't only be shared among us insiders – if we are to be true to our faith then we're to share the light of Christ with the world, especially those placed in the shadows of our society. The gospel passage echoes that truth: Peter, James, and John wanted to hang out there amidst those giants of faith, they wanted to continue basking in the glory and transfiguration of Jesus. Instead, God's directive was that they return to their lives, go back into the real and everyday, where people hurt, suffered, died. They had trouble making that transition back, that reintegration into the real world.

That's why Luke follows this Transfiguration story with that of the healing of a disgraced boy. All the Synoptic Gospels tell the story of the Transfiguration (underscoring its importance to the early church), and all of them end their accounts with the narrative of this "demon-possessed" boy. Not as a postscript, but as a "meanwhile." "Here's what was happening down below while Jesus was on the hilltop." Here's a boy in psychological and social chains, demons that took hold of his life. On the mountaintop the disciples hadn't understood, so they hadn't embraced that Transfiguration as theirs as much as Jesus's. So they weren't able to address this boy's plight, which is why Jesus refers to them – the disciples – as a "faithless and perverse generation."

Where does our world stand with that? Our world is dashing the poor against the rocks of despair, hunger, and abandonment everyday. The economic beast controlled by few demons is making our people convulse day and night. The homeless, the immigrant, the incarcerated, those mothers who work three jobs to make a minimum wage to feed three, four kids, they are like that boy, thrown into the shadows of our society, convulsing day and night right in front of us!

Are we open enough to our own transfiguration – or even just that of Jesus – to recognize their need and our place in addressing it? Are we still seeking to dwell in our worship tabernacles basking in your glory, away from the people and their pressing needs? Hard questions, but just ones.

We can't - mustn't – separate the Transfiguration story from that of the healing of the young boy. Rather, we're always called to have a transfigured gaze that faces both ways – that brings blazing light to both places – the inward gaze into ourselves and into our community of faith – and the outward one, beyond "Fortress Church," where we continue to be called on to rebuke the unclean spirits of the Powers That Be, and shed light into the lives of the poor of our communities. If we can't in some way bring these two orientations together – the inward and the outward – then the gospel's message is simply confirming for us that we will never know what transfiguration

means for ourselves and each other, and God's glory will remain an unknown word and experience for us all.

