

## **Mark 9:2-9**

### **Transfiguration Sunday - February 11, 2018**

We conclude the season of Epiphany with the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus goes up the mountain with three of his best friends and encounters there, saints from the other side, Moses and Elijah. The air is supercharged, cracking with intensity. They are in the presence of great promise and great power. Have you been through an electrical storm and stood in the aftermath of light? There is awe and wonder in the air and a bit of fear as well. The sky is swirling with light and clouds and a voice proclaims, "This is my Son, the beloved. Listen to him."

I have a preacher's confession for you this morning. When I saw that I would be preaching the Transfiguration story from the lectionary, I was very tempted to skip over this lesson and do something completely different. This story is as powerful as it is confusing and perhaps for some, completely over the top and hard to relate to in 2018.

I have been racking my brain this week trying to come up with a good sermon illustration, but I kept coming up short. Trying to set the scene for such an elaborate event like the transfiguration is not easy; that moment in time was full of all of the bells and whistles, smoke and fireworks.

I was tempted to talk to the Property committee to see if they could build something so that I could hydraulically rise up from the floor behind the pulpit amidst smoke and pyro-technics – you know, akin to a Superbowl half-time show. But this is no half-time show, so let's tackle this tricky story together – because I do believe it does have relevance for us here and now.

Our tendency is to try and tame religious experience into something we can control-- Peter expresses our own desire to control mystery and awe by trying in his own naive way, to institutionalize the moment: it is good for us to be here, let's make three little booths - one for you and Elijah and Moses. By trying to capture the moment and put something concrete around the mystery, Peter is like all of us who want to control the religious instinct by creating something permanent and lasting, something that says, we get the picture and we know what to do with it.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

There is a God who comes, who sweeps us up, who creates such a stir that our faces shine and our bodies dazzle and radiate with glory. Jan L. Richardson writes, "The story of the Transfiguration is about opening our eyes to glory, allowing that glory to alter us, and becoming willing to walk where it leads us."

Is there such a thing as divine being and intention far beyond us, up the mountain, even beyond the mountain into the heavens? Often this text is used to ask us to leave the mountain and return to the valley to serve suggesting that we are bound to have highs in our spiritual lives,

times when we feel alive or happy or completed in some way. But this interpretation also suggests that the real service is when we come down off those moments and begin life again in the real world.

But I think something else might be happening here for us. The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus is about opening our eyes to glory, letting it seep into our bodies, allowing it make a difference by becoming willing to walk wherever it might lead us. Desmond Tutu, the great South African Anglican priest suggested once that we are all agents of transfiguration and we are called to transform and change our personal relationships, our communities, our world, so that all become hospitable to joy, justice, freedom and peace. Tutu believed that God's glory makes a change so powerful in us that we will better serve the purpose of the Divine in the world.

Have you been to the mountaintop? Have you been in the presence of the Other? Have you seen the difference God's glory makes in the world? There are Transfigurations for all to see. A Berlin Wall tumbles down. Apartheid gives way to democracy in South Africa. An Arab Spring breaks open the oppressive regimes in the Middle East. We've witnessed remarkable moments of transfiguration amidst the struggles of the world and we continue to see how God is alive in the change and challenge of our lives creating those moments of glory every day.

Parkminster and many of our ecumenical partners are moving towards reconciliation with our Indigenous sisters and brothers. Through study, action, and an openness to listen, we have the opportunity to live out our commitment to just relationship in the present. This past week, Bill C-262 passed second reading and goes on to the Standing Committee for further consideration. On Facebook, Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools posted a thanks to all in The United Church of Canada who engaged in advocacy with their MPs to help ensure this next step in the journey. This ongoing work is a little sign of glory burst forth.

A few years ago, the Dali Lama was invited to speak at a Washington DC Think Tank dedicated to upholding the ultimate values of money and power in the market place. He introduced himself as a socialist and during his speech, which was so winsome and loving, folks could be seen wiping tears from their eyes. Needless to say, he talked about human rights and justice for the poor of the world. Glory shone out in his countenance and those present understood that they had been in the presence of someone who lived on a high mountain.

The Women's March in downtown Kitchener on January 21st was not so much a protest as a demand to be heard. As noted in The Record, "one placard read 'I am woman hear me roar' with the last three words crossed out and replaced with 'just hear me.' The event was part of a national movement designed to unify people who stand for the advancement of woman as well as human rights and civil rights." Hundreds of women, men and children, walked downtown Kitchener, not in a frenzy of anger and violence, but peacefully and in solidarity with any group that has been marginalized. There too, is the glory of God.

St Augustine has written that the glory of God is the human being fully alive. The disciples saw a human being charged with the power of glory, so alive with God on the mountain top--they were transfixed by the light and power of it all. The Transfiguration of Jesus tells us that God creates and makes us all come alive with the divine intention to charge the world into the fullness of God's glory.

The story of Transfiguration is not about leaving the mountaintop or releasing whatever we've grown attached to. It is not about resisting our desire to turn moments of transcendence into monuments. It is about opening our eyes to glory, allowing glory to alter us and recognizing that we are called to live in the presence of glory, daring to walk on the wild side, not to be merely religious or spiritual but to be transformational people willing to transform the world.

Transfiguration comes to us from the Latin translation of the Greek word which in English is metamorphosis. Metamorphosis which means transformation. May the power of the love that is God continue to transform us all, so that love can continue to be in the world.

This morning, the light of God's glory is all around us urging us to trust in the Divine's ability to change the way the world is and how we are to be in the world. May the power of the Word made flesh, alive and living in, with, through, and beyond us transform the world, so that all may know the love that is God.

Listen to the divine voice who calls us into love and hospitality, justice and freedom, peace and transformation. Thanks be to God. Amen.

~Rev. Heather Power