

**Matthew 17: 1-8**  
**Community and Change-One More Step**  
**Sunday, February 9, 2020 – Rev. Heather Power**

Today marks the end of our sermon series on Community and Change. Each week during the series Joe has started off with a light bulb joke. So here's mine...

How many Heather's does it take to change a light bulb?

Why change the light bulb when you can change the whole room!?

See, here's the thing, some change invigorates me. It's probably why I get sucked into all of those home improvement makeover shows. I love a good before and after – but I also really appreciate the reason behind the decisions made when transforming a room or a house – whether those changes are based on safety, budget, construction or design. Everything that's done has a specific purpose, no part of the process is meaningless. Sometimes homeowners struggle with letting go of what is --- what was. Now on these shows, it always seems to work out in the end and homeowners are elated with the resulted change. But the process to get to that point isn't always easy. Next steps can be difficult to take.

In the midst of changes that overwhelm us with emotion, that causes us to question who we are, that forces or asks us to let go of something cherished it can be difficult to see that any change is merely one more step in our life's journey. That is why perspective is so important when it comes to dealing with change. Perspective comes from wisdom, when we take the time to reflect on the changes in our own lives. Think about it, think about all the changes that you have been through, that have led you to this point in your life. At the time I am sure some of those changes seemed like the end of the world to you or perhaps they were positive changes that seemed like the beginning of an everlasting blissful future. But from this vantage point where you are now you can see that those changes were just one more step in your life's journey, forming you into the person you are today.

Perspective is something that Peter lacks in our story today. Our story is known as the transfiguration of Jesus, because in it Jesus is changed, his outward radiant appearance is symbolic of an inner change. The transfiguration is a transition event in the story 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.

Our tendency is to try and tame the unexpected into something we can control-- Peter expresses our own desire to control mystery, change and awe by trying in his own naive way, to institutionalize the moment. By trying to capture the moment and put something concrete

around the mystery, Peter is like all of us who want to control the spiritual instinct by creating something permanent and lasting, something that says, we get the picture and we know what to do with it.

Yet, 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. 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 complete in some way after a significant time of change and transformation. 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. This story 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 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. These are the steps we must take. Tutu believes that God's grace 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.

At the end of January, more than 11,000 families in St. Louis learned that their medical debt had been paid off, thanks to donations from local churches. United Church of Christ congregations and the Deaconess Foundation announced they had purchased \$12.9 million in medical debt for a fraction of the cost. They worked with a New York-based nonprofit, which used the donations to purchase the debt from collectors.

[Source: <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/>] A little sign of glory burst forth.

Members of a youth charity in a north Paris suburb that is known for gang violence were amazed when their efforts to clean up their neighbourhood inspired a national clean-up campaign. Hind Ayadi, founder of the arts charity, got 40 young people picking up litter and trash to raise awareness of environmental issues and encourage them to take pride in their neighbourhood. The volunteers then used social media to challenge the city of Marseille to make a similar effort. To their surprise, Marseille accepted the challenge, and in turn challenged another town. The challenge spread virally from city to city, including Nice and 26 other towns.

[Source: The Guardian] There too is the glory of God that comes from change and transformation.

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 just about leaving the mountaintop or releasing whatever we've grown attached to. It is not just about resisting our desire to turn moments of transcendence into monuments to hold on to. 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 take that one more step and be transformational people willing to change and transform 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 we listen to that loving voice who calls us into love and hospitality, justice and freedom, peace and transformation. Thanks be to God. Amen.