

MESSAGE: “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory”

Text: Mark 9:2-9

Liturgist Text: II Corinthians 4:3-6

Purpose: the purpose of this message is to celebrate the glory of Christ as it shines from the heart of the redeemed life.

MEDITATION

Sometimes we are so accustomed to seeing the ordinary that we forget the *extra-ordinary* exists. We see a kid walking home from school—oblivious to the fact that one day that kid may be an Olympic gold medalist, a writer of an Oscar-winning screenplay or President of the United States. We see an hour of time as something to use, waste or simply ‘get through’—oblivious to the fact that it may be an hour of imagination that will cure a disease, create a masterpiece or ignite a space adventure to colonize Mars. When we look with vision, really see, with hearts and minds as well as eyes, we may start shining with the glory of a miracle which was in front of us all along!

There is a Chinese proverb which goes like this: “If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person. If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house. If there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.”

Read: Mark 9:2-9.

Light in the soul. In Genesis 2:7, we are told, “God formed humankind from the dust of the ground, breathed into their nostrils the breath of life; and they became living beings.” ‘Breath of Life’ and ‘Light in the soul’ go hand in hand. God took *ordinary* dust and gave it the gift of *extra-ordinary* spirit, and that gift of miracle and possibility is planted inside each one of us. How is it awakened? By plugging the human heart into the vein of the Living God. In the words of Jesus, “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will bear much fruit.”

The Apostle Paul made reference to it in the words from II Corinthians which our Bible reader proclaimed earlier this morning, “God said the light should shine out of the darkness—the same God who shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ.”

For the past thirty years, I have preached annually on the Transfiguration of Jesus. Each time, I emphasized how through the Transfiguration, Jesus revealed to Peter, James and John (and through them, us also) his authentic divine self. His disciples knew him in

his humanity, but for the duration of this spectacular vision, they saw him in his glory, his divinity. The mask of *ordinary* was cast off, and they glimpsed the *extraordinary* of God's presence in the countenance beneath.

This unusual gift would anchor the disciples through the days of crucifixion, resurrection, gifting of the Holy Spirit and proclamation of the gospel. Quite likely, it was also God's way of fortifying Jesus for the Way of the Cross which would soon follow. The appearance of Moses and Elijah, gold standard prophets of Hebraic legend, as spiritual guides, suggests divine encouragement: "You're on the right path. You're doing God's will. It will be difficult, but God will see you through." And it that wasn't enough, the voice of God affirms from the cloud of God's theophany appearance, "This is my son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!"

Impetuous Peter, in his characteristic 'foot-in-mouth' way, reacts to this extraordinary vision by offering to build three tents or shrines: one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus. His awkward, well-meaning response, I suspect, reflects a human desire to 'pin down the holy' so that it will not be forgotten or lost to human experience. We build chapels, churches and cathedrals on holy sites, in a feeble attempt to tether God to earth's particulars.

But it is not the Transfiguration of Jesus that I wish to emphasize this morning, but rather the transfiguration of Peter, James and John, and, by extension, us. The voice of God doesn't address Moses, Elijah or Jesus. God speaks to the three human witnesses, the disciples, directing them to pay attention to the life-transforming message Jesus offers. Remember again, Jesus' own description of his purpose on earth, "I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly." In other words, Jesus effectively says, "I have breathed in you the capacity for *extra-ordinary* living. You have trained to be fishermen, but I will transfigure you into 'Fishers-of-men,' and the world itself will be transformed by your witness!"

This kind of transfiguration is not a form of theological magic or alchemy in which one thing changes into something else. When transfigured, Jesus did not cease to be human in order to become divine. I think of it more in terms of the sculptor's task: "to chip away everything that is not the figure within," a bit of wisdom attributed to Michelangelo or a scramble of others. Just as the transfiguration of Jesus reveals his true nature, the transfigured disciple shines with the love of God.

Consider the example of Mrs. Betty Tisdale who saved 219 orphaned, Vietnamese girls who were at risk of being put out on the streets. Inspired by a US Naval Doctor named Tom Dooley who wrote a book chronicling his efforts in 1954 to help Vietnamese refugees escape the communist north, Betty used her life savings and vacations to travel 14 times from

Georgia to Vietnam to help in hospitals and orphanages Dr. Dooley had founded. While in Saigon, she came to love the orphans of An Lac (Happy Place). When things heated up in Vietnam in April 1975, Betty was determined to come to the aid of 400 at-risk orphans. Her story was made into a film called, "The Children of An Lac," with Betty portrayed by Shirley Jones.

Betty left for Vietnam from Fort Benning, Georgia on a Sunday, arrived in Saigon Tuesday, and conquered every obstacle to airlift 400 children out of Saigon by Saturday morning. The head of Vietnam's social welfare announced he would only approve the export of children under age 10 with birth certificates. The children were lucky to be alive, but certainly did not have birth certificates. Betty went to the hospital pediatric department, obtained 225 certificates. And quickly created dates, times and places for the 219 eligible children. One by one, she overcame the obstacles thrown in her path. Within one month of their arrival in the United States, every one of the 219 orphaned girls was adopted. Betty could not help but recall the words of Dr. Tom Dooley which inspired her and kept her going, "It takes ordinary people to do extraordinary things."

This celebration of the glory of Christ shining from the face of the transfigured believer is lifted up in song. Every Thursday, for example, at the end of the Faith Journey session, we sing "Surely the Presence of the Lord Is in This Place." In the lyric we sing of seeing 'glory on each face.' What is this glory, if not the love of Jesus, flowing from the heart of one extraordinary person to the heart of another? I see it in your smiles, your compassion, your joy, and, yes, perhaps especially in the tears you shed for one another.

We sing of this transfiguration when we sing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," too. In the midst of civil conflict, author Julia Ward Howe proclaims the relentless triumph of God's truth and judgment, but then she comes to verse three: "In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea, with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me; as he died to make us holy, let us die to make all free, while God is marching on." The transfigured glory reveals the human heart as it was created to be, without distortion by pain, fear and selfish motives that maneuver one's way to the front of the line at the expense of others.

God's love in Christ sings a song of hope through the instrument of the disciple. When Peter, James and John look at the transfigured Christ, they see the *extra* beyond the *ordinary*. And certainly Jesus, as he looked at them on the day of his ascension, saw the *extra* beyond the *ordinary* of their witness. I wonder what others see in us who follow Jesus in the L-A area of southern Maine, 2018?