

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 11  
9:00AM | 11:00AM

LIGHT  
TRANSFIGURES  
EVERYTHING



Sunday, February 11, 2024  
“Light Transfigures Everything” | Jess Scholten  
Mark 9:2-9

Several times this past week, I’ve had moments when I should have lowered the shade in my office or put on sunglasses in the car, and instead, I just suffered a little with the brightness of it all, because the sunshine has been so wonderful – we’ve been lucky for several days.

Light has that kind of effect on things – not just the warmth of the sun or the way it creates some reflection through the glass – but how it can even internally... lift us.

A few years back, Covenant friend Nancy Enderle posted this photo of a vase with light shining through it: (visual – vase with light reflecting bright on wall)

It was a beautiful glimmer moment. Are you familiar with glimmer moments? They’re like the opposite of a trigger – instead of something that catches us in a negative way, a glimmer catches us in a breathtaking way, a moment of wonder and delight.

For comparison, I requested a second photo without any light shining in that particular spot: (visual – vase without light)

It’s a dramatic difference – light transfigures everything. (vase with light)

Our Scripture passage this morning is this time a bajillion – the story of Jesus being transformed by light – transfigured before the disciples in Mark chapter nine, verses 2-9: “Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my

Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

“As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”

A bit of a confession: this Scripture reading from the Gospel of Mark is slightly sanitized today. Not that the words were changed – that is the New Revised Standard Version that was on the screen and is in your pew Bibles. It’s the before and after that are sanitized – the prologue and the epilogue.

Because while we get a mountain top experience this morning, it is bookended by death. Less than a week prior to this particular hike, Jesus was telling his disciples how he must undergo great suffering, be rejected by the spiritual leaders of the day, be killed, and rise again after three days. This is that famous passage where Peter gets called Satan by Jesus – he listens in horror to Jesus talking of his death and then takes Jesus aside and gives him a few pointers on public speaking – maybe avoid saying things like that.

And we miss all that by jumping in where we do in chapter 9. We miss it all over again in the epilogue, which is where the disciples ponder among themselves again what on earth Jesus is talking about when he speaks of dying and rising again. It’s no wonder, with all these mysteries floating around in their heads, that when Jesus suggests they head out for a hike, they welcome the chance for a change of pace.

The hike itself offers some retreat into solitude—away from the crowds—for the disciples, away from the confusion—into the altitude—a place to be closer to the heavens and closer to God. We don’t know how long they hiked or how high. What we do know is that all of the sudden, Jesus is transfigured—transformed—into a radiant, glowing being with his clothes and face shining like the sun.

We just finished Exodus, and this shining is like when Moses glows after coming down Mount Sinai the second time after being in God’s presence—so bright he must wear a veil over his face. A **theophany** has occurred—a brush with the Almighty—those close encounters of the God-kind – like the story of Samuel hearing his name in the middle of the night and answering, “Speak, O Lord, for your servant is listening,” or the dove descending at Jesus’ baptism – these times where God’s presence breaks into the ordinary to make the whole experience shimmer. This is what happens on that

mountain. Jesus' glow reflects Creator God's glorious light, and it only comes from closeness with Almighty God. Jesus glows with the purity and glory of God.

And then Moses and Elijah enter the scene. From our perspective, it is

Jesus the Son of God, our Savior and Lord, with two guys from the Old

Testament. JESUS with Moses and Elijah. But Peter, James, and John, good Jewish boys, are thinking, "Our teacher, is hanging out with the two biggest big shots we can think of!" Jesus with **MOSES AND ELIJAH**. Their small-town rabbi was having a chat with THE two prominent figures of their religious heritage as Jews. Moses was the receiver and clearest representative of the law, as we read in Exodus; and Elijah, so important he was carried off to heaven in a whirlwind, represented the history of the prophets.

It's no wonder the disciples are afraid—it's no wonder Peter is not really sure what to do but to respond with action. When theophanies happen, sometimes, it's a comfort. Sometimes, it's a shock. Sometimes it's so confusing, we don't know what to do, so like Peter, we stumble out some instructions or create some sort of plans instead of sitting in the moment. For Peter, that was the familiarity of building dwellings – tents or tabernacles of sorts – creating structures which helped solidify the important moment that was before them.

Instead, God's voice comes from the sky: This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!

The Reverend Linda Kuhn, a friend and honorably retired pastor in this presbytery, has a special motto she uses in teaching: don't just do something, stand there! Too often, in the face of something new or something out of the ordinary, we rush to take action. But listening involves stillness, being present, paying acute attention to the words, the vibe, the body language, of the one to whom we are listening.

When we listen to others, we focus, make eye contact, pay attention. When we listen to Jesus, we also are called to a worshipful time of paying attention. "Be still," speaks God through the psalmist, "and know that I am God." Don't just do something. Stand there! Sit there. Be there. Be attentive to Jesus... in prayer time, in worship, in the face of those you meet.

That's where we're headed as a congregation this Lent, which begins Wednesday with worship at 7 and the imposition of ashes, marking us literally for the ways we sit in

Lent and pay closer attention in faith. Our upcoming theme for Lent is the ways we can be more fully alert to God's presence – practices that help make us better disciples of Jesus: fasting, praying, listening, simplifying, and unplugging.

Our third practice and a practice which is part of almost all spiritual disciplines is God's call in the midst of this theophany: listen to Jesus. Be present to where God is at work. Theophanies are happening, Jesus is speaking. Pay attention. Listen.

Transfiguration Sunday is this annual doorway that leads us from the Light of Epiphany to the reflective darkness that is Lent. It's the Sunday we set aside to remember this remarkable event where Jesus climbs a mountain with a few chosen disciples and is transfigured before them. But for as amazing of a story as it is – as mystical and awe-inspiring, it is not simply a representation of a sun-shiny faith. It is the representation of the ways God mysteriously interacts with the world.

Faith communities are one of the few places where we actually have the opportunity to bravely walk into a recognition of the ways that we are dying and rising in our lives, to walk into the mystery, to walk into the unknown. Most things around us promise us that we will walk into something amazing – the most magical place on earth, a one-of-a-kind adventure, places where the sun only shines.

But our faith invites to walk into difficulty and struggle, like Jesus speaking openly about his impending death. Because it is only in death that there is resurrection, it is in darkness that we can more fully appreciate and remember the light. Mountaintops are only moments – descending back to the valley into the work of faith is our call.

Maybe that's why God shows up so brilliantly on that mountain – because of what is to come. Theophanies, mountain top experiences – these are not things that happen by our work. They are things that happen because of God's glory. And they can carry us when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, through the sleeves-rolled-up work that is how we live our faith in the day to day. The brilliant glimmer of mountaintop experiences or even more ordinary experiences of God's presence – things like that message in a dream, the nudge in prayer, the moment of beauty in nature – these things help buoy us in the work of justice and love in action.

Light transfigures everything.

When Nancy posted this a few years ago, she reflected: "I came downstairs as the sun caught this vase and scattered shapes of light.... It called out to me as a metaphor for

what God calls us to do with the light we are given: reflect, shine and leave a mark on those who need some love!”

When we do experience light – sometimes in the form of a beautiful sight or sometime through enlightenment or a dawning, it is a gift from God. And these gifts – these dazzling moments – can encourage us. They help us cope when there is confusion, pain, death, and despair.

We know life is not all sunshine and rainbows. And thanks be to God our faith doesn’t need us to act like life is all perfection – our faith helps us to live into whatever comes our way with endurance and hope. Because when we pay attention to God at work in the world, our eyes and our minds are opened to new possibilities. When we listen to Jesus, when we stay present to God, when we remember those times that God’s light shined brightly in our lives, we are carried through.

We’re headed into Lent – we’re about to be reminded of the full depth of human mortality – that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We are about to remember the full effects of sin – of the ways that power can distort humankind to killing even God Almighty in Jesus. We are about to bravely go forward into the valley.

But we will not forget the light – we will not forget that wherever we are or whatever we go through, God is present with us, teaching us, if we will listen. Thanks be to God. Amen.