

Thin Places

Transfiguration Sunday

Exodus 24: 12-18 Matthew 17: 1-9

Today we celebrate Transfiguration Sunday. I like to think of it as an “other worldly Sunday”.

We are celebrating that God, the Trinity cared enough about making sure the disciples understood who Jesus really was. After all of the miracles and the teaching, it was a little bit more,

Making sure the disciples knew who Jesus really was and what God was all about. It was that little bit of “extra”.

It was that little bit of sacredness that we all need at times to know that God is really with us. That God is real

My day job is working for Hospice at Carle.

I am the bereavement coordinator and one of the things I am privileged to do is to lead grief support groups. I encourage all group members to work on self-care, but also just as important, making the time every day to do something, anything that give them joy.

When someone is grieving, that can be a hard thing to do, but it is so important to recognize those times when you feel a little jolt of pleasure.

A little bit of something that gives us energy. It could be a small thing like cuddling up in a cozy blanket and drinking some hot chocolate or tea.

Or it could be reading a book to a grandchild. Just so long as you do something that can make you feel a little bit more alive.

I also believe that God is in those moments of spark, of togetherness and of praise. Sometimes those moments are small, like suddenly being surprised by a glorious sunrise or sun set. We see God's glory in the mountains or prairies.

Other times it may be that still small voice giving us the assurance that everything really is going to be ok. Or, it could be something so striking that we cannot deny the Spirit's moving. We may have felt that at the time of a child's birth or at a death. It may have been because of the peace we feel or it could have been something even more dramatic, even more moving.

This is our fallow time.

We are on the cusp of Lent. Ash Wednesday is this coming Wednesday. And Lent is traditionally a time of somberness, of examination. Where we recommit ourselves to being disciples. Where traditionally, we look at the things or the priorities we have and how they get in the way of our relationship with God and with our community.

It can be a sobering time, a time where we are stripped of enjoyments that may shield us from our true selves. We may feel our wounds more and we may feel the results of our past sins more. And when we are faced with our true selves, our unadorned selves, it is helpful to know that there is such a thing as the glory and the mystery of the Transfiguration.

That when we come to the realization of our mistakes, our faults, there is another reality. There is the other worldliness of God's glory.

When we read these stories of God's glory with our 21st century eyes and minds, we have to deal with the fact that when we are talking about faith, we have to take into account that glory and mystery is a part of our faith.

Glory and mystery are a part of our faith. Things happen that we just can't put into words. Be it in the times of beauty we notice or, be it in the human interactions we have.

I know of very few people who have experienced a dazzling light or an extreme warmth that has come unexplainably. But I have faith that God comes to us in ways that we will never be able to understand.

I am not here this morning to explain to you the mystery of the glory of God. But I AM here to tell you that these experiences are a part of our history as people of faith. And, they inform our faith.

In the texts for today, we have two stories where God's glory is the main point. The first one is when God invites Moses into God's glory and during that time, God gives Moses the 10 Commandments. The second story is of Jesus' transfiguration in the presence of his disciples.

Why are these stories so important? And why do we celebrate these stories before Lent? Because we need to be open to the mystery in the midst of our imperfect world. Be it in celebrating a beautiful sunset or sunrise or in letting go of someone precious as they leave this earthly journey.

God's mystery and glory is everywhere. And when that mystery and glory do come in our day-to-day world, we realize who really is in control.

Because God does have the Whole World in God's Hands!

I like to note that Moses had to wait for God to invite him into God's presence. It wasn't an automatic thing. Moses waited for 6 days before he was invited into God's presence. And then Moses spent 40 days cut off from his community.

Moses went up the mountain with his Elders, then just he and Joshua proceeded and then only Moses. And then he waited for 6 days before he was invited into God's glory.

God chose when the moment was right for Moses.

Could it be that God also chooses the moment when we too are also ready? Could God also be waiting for when we can truly hear and when our hearts are really open?

God's self giving is never casual or incidental. We are dealing with a being who will not be infringed upon or will not be taken for granted.

Because God's holiness is never just handed over.

We love hearing about God's welcoming love for everyone, but yet, we must understand that it is never cheap or assuming. God may wait until we are ready.

And when we are allowed to experience God's glory, it is mysterious and gives us a whole new understanding of God's perfect way.

This whole understanding was illustrated for me vividly when I heard a story about some old family friends.

My parents were missionaries in Japan and one of the difficulties of being a missionary family was not only the separations the families went through, but also the change in culture.

It was not uncommon that in order for children to receive a good education, many families chose to send their children to boarding school. And, I am sure that was never an easy choice.

As today, parents struggled between serving the church and being present for their children.

When the children graduated from High School, they were sent back to the United States to attend college.

Children were faced with the challenge not only of going to college, but also being away from their culture that they grew up in and being away from family and friends.

For many, this separation also included not even being allowed to pick up a phone and call home.

These transitions we face as young adults are hard enough even in the most supportive circumstances.

And this particular family openly struggled.

Andrew was a son of missionaries who for many years struggled with alcohol and drugs controlling his life.

One night after many attempts of recovery, Andrew was in a bar, got into a fight, fell and hit his head.

He never recovered.

And his father, Calvin said, "The Lord was good to take him."

When Calvin went to the town where Andrew had died, he attended church the Sunday after his death.

Since it happened to be a Sunday that was also the pastor's first Sunday, everyone was asked to wear name tags.

During the passing of the peace, in this unknown church, Calvin turned to face a man who's name was the same as his son's, Andrew.

He looked like Andrew, he had a beard like Andrew. Calvin explained that his son had recently died and he had been unable to hug him goodbye.

Could he do so now?

Andrew graciously consented and Calvin, in that moment, was able to hug his son goodbye.

We do not know what kind of healing went on in that moment.

What kind of asking for forgiveness and reconciliation took place in that relationship. But certainly there was mystery and there was glory and there was love and understanding. God's glory can use us in ways we have no idea for healing and for peace.

The disciples came down the mountain. They wanted to stay where God's glory was real. But Jesus took them down and even told them to not say anything about this until he was gone.

They came down the mountain. But they came down the mountain with the understanding that God is with us in mysterious ways.

That God will give us a spirit of understanding and welcome that if a stranger who is bowed down with grief who prayed for years for healing and wholeness for his son but never got it, knows that sometimes God's grace is in us and in our gracious response to others. Maybe we are the ones who are healed.

Calvin has also passed away now.

And I have to hope that they are all in heaven where God makes everything new again. Where there is a new heaven and a new earth.

Amen