

Feb 19, 2023 Transfiguration Sunday

Pr. Steve

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

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

When I was a child, I received religious education in those formative years. And it doesn't matter when we come to the faith, eventually we hear this language which says God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and it goes on and on and on. And as a child, I wondered who figured that out. And how did they know? And while I was taught that God was caring, there was also this sense that God was way far away--and keeping a safe distance--from us.

And in latter years, I have come across this wonderful phrase which says that the work of God is the lifting of humanity into divine intimacy. Lifting humanity into divine intimacy. Isn't that lovely? Isn't that what we just experienced in the dance? So close, inseparable. Falling apart. Learning. Sharing. Where are you? Collapsing. Recovering.

Thank you, Lillian and Meridith, for a profound experience of the intimacy of God, our mother. Mmm. It's all Jesus was trying to share with us. Somehow, we still need reinforcements.

On Mount Sinai, Moses goes up the first time, and meets God in the burning bush--and there receives the very name of God. I printed it in your bulletin. See on that third page, Y H W H, Hebrew unpronounceable to this day in the Jewish Community--nobody attempts to say the name of God. Christians have used it--*Yahweh*. Some say it's the origin of our breath if you emphasize it--inhale YAH, [exhale]WEH.

[It's a] great, great mystery, which cannot be fully translated, usually '*I am who I am*', the burning bush says, or '*I am who I am becoming*', or all of the above, and more. In English, the closest we get to the meaning of this is the word, '*being*'. It is used 6,500 times in the Hebrew scriptures--*Yahweh*. It can be a noun, as we use 'being' in English, and in Hebrew that noun is feminine. We don't talk too much about that part, do we? It's also a verb, an active verb, being--being alive. When Jesus teaches us the Lord's Prayer, '*Abba/Imma in heaven, Holy be your name*', undoubtedly he's referring to Yahweh.

A great mystic, 14th century, wrote a book called The Cloud of the Unknowing, and in it teaches all of us--'*God is your being, and who you are. You are in God.*' I'd like to have you just repeat that after me in a moment, and say it just barely out loud, [it] has to be at least a whisper. Something happens to us when we say these things to ourselves. You're saying it to nobody else. All right? You're just saying it--you may want to close your eyes. You're just saying this to yourself. Try this--close your eyes if you wish. '*God is my being.*' Go ahead. '*God is my being, and who I am. I am in God.*' ...Carry that throughout the week.

There is one thing that Yahweh cannot mean, and that is Lord. Now let me be real clear.

We have used that word [Lord], and it has become special to us in many ways. I think of, especially, the song, "*Precious Lord, take my hand.*" There's a sweetness of connection, right? This is not what I'm talking about. Ready? I'm talking about...the name cannot mean 'Lord'. That comes to us from the Greek, 'Kyrios' and Latin, 'Dominus', where we get Lord or Master. Yeah, nothing to do with that. Besides, in Hebrew there is a word *Adon*, which means Lord and Master, and if the authors wanted to use that they would have. They're talking about, *Y H W H*, the God who is imminent, the God who is close to every person and creature within creation, the God who is caring and involved, like a mother.

In our text today—Exodus--that word in the Hebrew, *Yetziah*, means flourishing. We spent some time on this a few years ago, pre-Covid, (couple of you might remember). Flourishing...the sunrise is Exodus. Bread rising is Exodus. Birth waters breaking in a mom about to give birth is Exodus, *Yetziah*, life flourishing. The Nile overflowing to create fertile valleys for growth is *Yetziah*, and crossing of the Red Sea, *Yetziah*. Wherever life is flourishing, and people are being set free, that's Exodus. Such an impact, yes?

50 days after the enslaved are set free from Egypt, they are back at Mount Sinai. Moses enters the cloud of Mystery, the Holy One. The text shares that the people at the base of Mount Sinai saw thunder. What? So it says crystal clear in the text. They saw Thunder. It's the first recorded, communal, dazzling, ecstatic vision. You see voices. This is a big deal, people, really big deal.

And when Moses emerges from the cloud, he shares with people--the Covenant. We are now in relationship with God. This is not the authoritarian emerging from the mountaintop saying, '*You've got ten chances to please God, or you're gone*', which is how we take it, isn't it? (I mean, especially the Lutherans among us learn, '*You've got 10 chances or you're out.*') No, it's about a loving relationship. God is saying, '*Be my people, I'll be your God. Here are ten ways of nourishing that identity and relationship.*' See how we've distorted the story? That's why God says to the Jewish people, '*You are my chosen folks, forever!*'

The transformation story today, Transfiguration, there's Jesus going up—guess what?--a mountain, and they're meeting Moses and Elijah, whose name means Eli-- my God, Jah. Oh my God is Jah. In Judaism today, they're bringing that back. What's the name of God? Jah! You'll hear it at Beth Chaim. Praise Jah. This is why surrounded in the cloud that great place of mystery. The Cycles are with Him. Peter start saying, '*Let's build shelters, do something here.*' Moses and Elijah are consulting with Jesus, about, usually, English translations say, his 'Exit'. (This translation is a dismal failure). They're consulting with him about his 'Exodus'. '*How will you, Jesus, make life flourish?*' That we can never get enough, isn't it? They talk about Disarming. Life. The Powerful.

We, who live in a world where it says you can cure violence with violence--I think we've been trying that--for is it 5,000 or 10,000 years? '*If we just get a little more violent, death will go away.*' Look at those weapons systems we are sending Ukraine. We've got to win, right?

What healing in the depths of our own transformation must take place the healing in the vilest of brokenness that goes on and on and on among us. How do we lift humanity into divine intimacy? That's the path. And that's what today is about-- its pivot point, as I said, the Transfiguration. It's after this consultation about his own Exodus that the scriptures say Jesus 'set his face like flint towards Jerusalem', to go and expose the powers that be, to reveal the compassion which can heal and transform humanity. This is the pivot point, beginning with the Transfiguration--dazzling illumination--through the cross and its degradation, turning into a Tree of Life for our liberation, a path of Peace being carved for us.

I've been speaking these last several weeks about the necessity of our own inner transformation, inner spirit, inner life, inner connection. It is so important because our transformation is what God uses for the transfiguration of the world. It happens within us for the sake of the world. We are called to be God's partners in this Transfiguration. The part we don't get, the part we object to--is why you move from this illumination, dazzling beyond comprehension. An illumination, I believe, emanating from within Christ himself, then after the Exodus consultation, goes into the crass valley of violence and misunderstanding--precisely where we live. That's the Christ path, moving toward us, moving into intimacy, moving towards transformation, and inviting us to follow because the compassion of Christ, the wisdom of God, is given us for the sake of others. For the sake of others, not just us. It's a dazzling path—God invites us to reflect who God is--so that others can see who God is, lifting all of us into divine intimacy.

Keep dancing.

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding. Keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Him 697 697.