

Video Feb. 14, 2021 Transfiguration Sunday

[Gary Sponholtz plays organ followed by Singing Bowl]

Welcome to our Transfiguration Sunday celebration. This is the culmination of the Epiphany season, and our preparation as we move into Lent, which begins this next Wednesday, Ash Wednesday.

We begin in the name of God, Creator, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

O God, deliver us from all that is not you, that our hearts might rest deep within the bountiful embrace of your infinite love for us. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

For the first lesson for today, I'm simply going to paraphrase from **Second Kings**.

It has been made clear to Elijah, the prophet, that he is to be delivered to the heavens, and his chief disciple, Elisha, begs him, 'First of all, don't go, don't leave me.' We all know that longing, right?, for each other. *Loved ones, don't leave.* Elijah says, 'It's not going to happen. I am on the move. What else might you want?' And Elisha says, 'If I can't have you, then give me a double measure of your spirit.' Hmm. What a request, huh? A double measure of your spirit. And Elijah says, 'I can't deliver that either. But if you stay focused on me as I rise into the heavens, perhaps God will deliver that to you.' If you stay focused.

The second lesson is from **2nd Corinthians, chapter 4**, just this portion.

It is not our way to be devious. No, in God's sight we commend ourselves to every human being. with a conscience by showing that we speak the truth openly. It is not ourselves that we are proclaiming, but Christ Jesus our Lord. For it is God who said, Let light shine out of darkness,' that is shown into our hearts to enlighten us with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the very face of Christ.

Psalm 50, the first six verses:

*The God of gods is speaking,
from east to west God summons the earth.
From Zion, perfection of beauty,
the light shines forth.
God is coming; our God will not be silent.*

*Devouring fire ahead of him,
raging tempest around him,
God summons the heavens from on high,
and the earth to judge the peoples.*

*'Gather to me my faithful
who sealed my Covenant with sacrifice.'
For the heavens proclaim God's saving justice,
and God will be our judge.*

Praise to the God who is praise to the God who was praise to the God who is to
come for ages unending?

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The gospel for today is from **Mark, chapter 9**, the story of the Transfiguration. This painting behind me was a special gift from Rich Collins and family, honoring Judy Collins who died 10 years ago. It is a painting of the Transfiguration, this profound moment of revelation to the disciples.

Jesus took with him Peter James and John and led them up a high mountain until they were by themselves. And there in their presence he was transfigured. His clothes became brilliantly white, whiter than any earthly bleach could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were consulting with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Rabbi,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; let us make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Peter didn't know what he was saying, they were so frightened. Then a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and from that cloud there came a voice, 'This is my son, my Beloved. Listen to him.'

And suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus.

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In the name of God, most holy wisdom beyond all understanding, our Source, our comfort, our life.

Jesus takes the inner circle up a high mountain. Gathering with them come Elijah and Moses, both of them great liberators within the community of Israel. And suddenly there is a blazing incandescence of brightness emanating from within Jesus, piercing the horizon. Disciples fall down aghast, not knowing what is happening, cowering, covering themselves. And we have in the story the mystery of Jesus' sonship being illuminated, the very path that he will travel for after this. He says, 'Now, let us go to Jerusalem.' That very path is resisted by his own disciples; they try to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. The cross already was imminent in Jesus' life. He was outsider. He was suspect. The disciples' minds and hearts were clouded, clouded from the inside--they couldn't see.

Pastor Lucy sent me a few comments from Madeleine L'Engle. I think this is about the core of Jesus' teaching and ministry.

She wrote,

Love is not power. Love is giving power away, power in the sense of control. When God saw what a miserable mess we are making by clinging to power, Christ was given us--the Christ who threw his own power away, emptied Himself of equality with God to become like us. He came to show us that the love of power,

the power over others, is literally killing us. And God who is all power, gave away this power so that we might know love, lavish love, hanging not onto power, but unto God. Power wants control; God's power wants to give us freedom. This is the great light of Revelation, Transfiguration, bursting through the very body-being of Jesus that day; he was being swallowed up in brilliance, and accompanied by Elijah and Moses, as I said, the two liberators of Israel. They were consulting with Jesus about his 'exodus'. Remember that word, 'exodus', and what it means, *Yetsiah*, in Hebrew? It means the flourishing of life. Where does it flourish? That is God's deepest devotion to us--to make life flourish everywhere, especially in the darkness. Jesus is found

between these two luminaries. And very soon he will be found between two criminals, two criminal revolutionaries on their crosses together with him. It is, as we say, a downward path that Jesus takes us on--this releasing of power, so that we might be released and have our hearts put back in touch with that communion with all life, for which Christ gives his life, empties himself. That's where the light then can emerge, an astonishing light, for us and all time. This voice from the cloud, then, which hovers and covers them, says, 'This is my Beloved. Listen to it.' It's the most important thing, is to listen. Listen to that voice of God within, within the community, within the scriptures. *'Keep listening.'* And when the cloud dispersed, there was no one but Jesus, who touched the disciples, who removed their fear, and invited them to accompany him further.

This week the impeachment trial has been going on and we're learning more and more about ourselves, what we're capable of, but especially the use and abuse of power--and how it darkens our lives, even the life of a whole nation. When Grace is no longer experienced as reality, the realm of freedom is lost too. Where there is no Grace, there is no freedom. It's easy for so many of us to be trapped by cynicism; it's so much easier simply to demonize the other side, isn't it?

I don't know how much contemplation our national political leaders actually do. They probably don't even know about it, but it is dangerous to have public officials leading the way when there's no sense of truth-telling, when they are consumed by self-interest, power, and fear.

Negative identity, attacking others, is shallow, and it comes far more easily than being responsible in life for the choices that we make. It's so much easier to be against things, against others, than to be for something.

And this is the work of Christ: that Jesus, in that reign of God and creating the Beloved Community, is always for us, God is always for us, for our well-being, for our improvement. It is not fear-based or trying to grab power.

Freedom is so often presented in our society as having multiple choices and options and preferences, but that's not primal freedom. The primal freedom is to

become ourselves, to live into the truth, no matter what the consequences. It is exercising personhood in community, in a responsibility towards others. It desires most of all to pay attention to the truth.

That's what great spiritual practices offer us, is that encouragement to live from these deeper truths. It has been said that secular freedom is having to do what you want to do, but spiritual freedom is wanting to do what you have to do. Spiritual freedom is wanting to do what you have to do.

That is a great, blazing, incandescent light from which we most often want to turn away. But that is how we will create our future, and a healthy, spiritual community. It doesn't work to create a church with just individuals. It just doesn't work when people are out to get their own spiritual fix, and then move on.

Today my message is really quite old-fashioned, and conservative-- that the church only works when we have people desiring a real connection with God. And for that to happen, and when that does happen, then we are disposed to appreciate, not only our lives, but the gathering of the community in worship, to be reconnected, becomes a critical priority. We understand, then, the necessity of commitments to the larger society, its transformation healing and the work of Justice.

And the third thing we understand is there is a place for this community we call Church. Sometimes it feels crazy and oddball and awkward and weird. Yes. Yes. Yes, and it is how we are grounded, and that Grace which will not let go of us.

Three things are needed for the practice of our faith.

First, we need to experience it. We need to experience God. We need to experience that compassion which knows no end. It is always a gift. It is never a possession. We have no power over it. It comes to us through prayer and meditation, in the spirit, the laughter, and the love of each other.

But we need the second thing that we need is to hear the teachings of what is real, and what is unreal. We need to hear the teachings of Jesus, Elijah and Moses. We need to hear them. Otherwise, we drift into abyss.

And, finally, we need the community which helps break through the illusions of our individualism, and gives us a restoration of a light that we need: To see ourselves honestly, and openly, and in communion with others.

It's a blazing light. It's a quiet light. It's the light through whom we are seen by God, eternally as loved.

Amen.

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

And in our prayers today we remember the national leadership of our country that it may pursue truth with an open heart

We pray for all falsely imprisoned.

We pray for the Muslim Uighurs in camps in China.

We pray for those pursuing democracy in Hong Kong.

We pray for all who are taken down by COVID who have lost loved ones, and who yet await a vaccine of hope.

We pray for all feeling the isolation of this nearly year-long imprisonment, cut off from each other and spiritual community, from loved ones from family and friends.

We pray for all who feel no hope.

We pray for young people that a new vision of life may reinvigorate them with gratitude for a future that they will live into and claim.

We pray for Don, who has now entered into hospice care, those who have lost loved ones recently.

And we pray for those who pray for us.

Oh God, fill us with that peace, which the world cannot give. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.