

March 3, 2019/Transfiguration Sunday

Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-43;

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"Glory Overshadowed"

Today we have that iconic story of Jesus' Transfiguration. It is a story given to us by Matthew, Mark and Luke that we are called to listen to every year at this time. The Sunday which ends the season after Epiphany, where we have been hearing the teachings of Jesus, and before the beginning of the Lenten season, where we prepare ourselves to understand again, the great mystery of Easter. The mystery of what God has done in and through the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

It is in the Transfiguration story that we hear, and see, what the true identity of Jesus really is. It is a story placed right in the middle of the Jesus story. It stands midway between two major events. Jesus' baptism, where in Luke's gospel, Jesus receives the Holy Spirit as he is praying, and where a voice comes from heaven, saying, *"You are my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*

And the crucifixion, where he is mockingly called by his accusers and persecutors, *"the Christ of God"*, *"God's chosen one"*, and where a centurion at the foot of the cross declares, *"Certainly this man was innocent!"*

So here we have this scene, that is to help us know and understand better who this Jesus is. For that is indeed the primary purpose of the gospel writings and of this story in particular. To shine a light, on the identity of Jesus, as the Christ of God.

And every year we have this story, and we contemplate the *glory* and *divinity* of Christ, of this man Jesus. Of how he is the *Son, the Child of God, Christ, Messiah, the light of the world.*

But this year, I can't seem to go there. I can't seem to find it in myself to dwell in the *glory* of Christ, the glowing raiment, the appearance of Israel's Law and Prophets personified, the experience of God's presence, there on that mountain top, with those disciples. I'm just not there.

Where I am, is in the next part of the story. I feel like I am in the cloud. The cloud that comes upon those disciples. That comes upon them in that night that they are already in. The cloud that comes and deepens the darkness they know and which causes them to be afraid, fearful and uncertain. That's where I am this year.

And it seems to me that maybe some of you, not all of you, but some may be in that place as well. Sometimes, our world can feel like a dark cloud is overshadowing us, is putting us in a state of emotional upheaval, or uncertainty. It may be a feeling of being off balance, confused, or unable to gain a foothold in a fast-paced, changing world.

For me right now, I think it has to do with a sense of frustration and helplessness with so many of the things happening around me. The political situation in our nation; the growing divisions between our own people, politically, economically, racially; the sense of injustice that

seems to be more and more prevalent in so many parts of our country and our world; and the fact that there seems to be no one willing to stand up and address so much of it. It is a sense that we are being overshadowed by a darkness that we have no power or control over. And it is unsettling. It is frightening.

I recently read a book, entitled Leadership in Turbulent Times, in which author Doris Kearns Goodwin tells about four of our nations presidents: Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Lyndon B. Johnson. In her telling about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, she describes the challenges that he faced. His fight with the corrupt Tammany political machine and their hold on the Democratic Party; about his battle with polio and the physical struggles he endured; and about how he worked tirelessly and endured to turn this nation around in the midst of the Great Depression. It was a time of fear, of terror, of hunger, unrelieved poverty, and prolonged unemployment. It was a time of darkness and deep distress. And the words of his first inaugural address, given in 1933, speak so clearly of that time: *"This is a day of national consecration."* he began. He would say, *"Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment."* And those famous, iconic words, *"the only thing we have to fear, is fear itself."* But he had a light within him that others could see. He had the ability to reach out and connect with the common person, and to offer hope and a promise to share in their suffering as they worked together, *"willing to sacrifice for the common good."* Together, under his leadership, this nation was able to find its way out of those dark and shadowy times.

One of my favorite stories is about another man who faced dark and trying times. John Wesley, the protestant reformer and founder of Methodism. After being ordained a priest in the Anglican Church, he left England and went to Savannah, Georgia to serve a church there. But things did not go so well. He was unpopular with the colonists. Had a disastrous love affair with a young woman. His involvement with some Moravians led him to question the state of his soul, and he failed to realize his hopes of a mission to the American Indians in Georgia. He wrote in his journal, *"I came to convert the Indians, but, oh, who will convert me?"* Wesley felt overshadowed with depression and uncertainty about his Christian faith, and he soon returned to England. However, the time was not wasted. The questions that drove him from Georgia brought him "very unwillingly" to a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, where he had his famous *"heart-warming"* experience. Though he couldn't see it at the time, a light did shine within him, and would eventually lead him to become one of the greatest religious leaders of his time.

We too may feel like those disciples on the mountain with Jesus, overshadowed by clouds of fear and doubt and uncertainty. The message of the gospel however, is that a light still shines, and a voice still speaks, *"This is my Son, my Chosen, my Beloved; listen to him."*

As we prepare ourselves for Ash Wednesday and the self-searching and introspection that comes in the season of Lent, may we open our eyes, as well as our hearts, and watch for that light, the light of Christ, the light of love, who shines through the clouds and darkness of our lives.

And may we listen. Listen to that voice that overcomes all our fears. Amen.