

February 26, 2017
Matthew 17: 1-9
Rev. Joy R. Haertig

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight O God, our strength and our redeemer.”

I want to see and experience that metamorphosis of Jesus on the mountaintop.

Don't you?

This kind of vision is not the kind of thing we talk about much --- or that many of rational types believe is even possible.

Some form of the Transfiguration story is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Scholars believe it was a commonly shared story long before the Gospels were even written. It is an amazing testimony to Jesus as the Son of God as he appears to be light itself and to hear the voice of God affirm that this is his beloved Son with whom he is well pleased...listen to him! (God does not say “worship him” but “listen to him” ...he has things to teach us!)

This story would tell well around the campfire or on a street corner in Ephesus.

A vision like this would not seem so out of the ordinary to the first listeners who would know well the spiritual visions found in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 10, verse 11 a blazing figure appears to Daniel and say's “greatly beloved, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you.”

Having Moses and Elijah, the most significant figures of Jewish history appear with Jesus in this vision is an affirmation of his place in history, and God's proclamation affirms that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise. Again – the story is a testimony of who Jesus is, and a powerful one. We do not need to get bogged down on whether it “really” happened or not.

What is important is to let this story serve as a reminder to us that the earliest followers of Jesus, the down-to-earth men and women who left everything and followed him, hardly knowing why – could use this story to talk about how Jesus, **for all his obvious humanity, Jesus had something which radiated from him that spoke of ineffable and eternal truth.** (Feasting on the Word, Douglas John Hall)

I also find it helpful to remember that this story shows up in the Gospel of Matthew right after Jesus has told his disciples that he was sure to be facing suffering and death in Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans and the religious authorities. The news of his potential death was confusing and disturbing to them. Remembering and proclaiming Jesus' metamorphosis on the mountain is like a glimpse of the resurrection. Here then is a vision they could hold on to – a vision which affirms, no matter the suffering – **love will win.**

This vision would be carved on their hearts when they went back down the mountain to continue the difficult work of saving, blessing, and caring for the world.

Perhaps you noted that for a brief moment -- Peter wanted to stay there in that glorious, safe, and protected sanctuary away from suffering and struggle, but Jesus was never about being great and glorious – it was not about him being the best Son, God ever had – it was always about doing the work of Love.

Love wins only by going back down the mountain and getting your hands dirty in the realities of our struggling world.

Writer Nancy Rockwell describes Jesus in this way: “He never wanted to be anything more than an ordinary guy from Galilee. He never wanted a palace, never wore silks, never got his face engraved on any money...He told his friends he could teach them about [God’s love and purpose]. For a text he used the fish in their nets, the sheep in their fields, the seeds farmers sowed, and yeast in a woman’s hands. And he added his own special seasoning for the bread of their lives, a few blind men, a few lepers, a foreign woman with a sick child, a Roman centurion in despair for his dying daughter, quite a number of prostitutes and a woman who had five husbands. One day he went up a mountain with two friends, he appeared to them to be shining in light...He never asked them to see his glory, he only wanted them to see his willingness to suffer...”

I have been thinking a lot about how this Jesus – the one who is not focused on being great or rich or comfortable – the one who immerses himself in the world, embodying what it means to love as God loves, even if it is not always easy – **is still the One who directs and inspires us as individuals and as a faith community.** It is the inspiring, eternal presence of Jesus which we call “the Christ” – that keeps teaching and inspiring us today.

It has been a while since I have said anything to the congregation about the work of our MUCC Vision Team. A group of people who have been charged with the task of considering where we are going as a church in the next 3 – 5 - 10 years. I picture this group like the first set of farmers who are turning over the soil and getting it ready for further tilling and eventual planting. They are a small group of people who are beginning the conversation, **knowing full well** the conversation and decision making has to eventually come to the congregation for further turning, tilling, and planting. (Vision Team: Sheila Vortman, Anna Pedrosa, Patrick Hennessey, Bev Fissel, Michael Escalante, Paul Gibbs, Lucia Shubert, Scott and I)

This past month the Vision Team began working with our current Vision/Purpose/Covenant statement that was created 6 or so years ago now when the Rev. Scott Opsahl was the interim

pastor. At that time our congregation had come through a difficult time of conflict and loss and so the vision statement which has shaped our ministry these past years, reflected a church inspired by the healing presence of Jesus which would rebuild a more intentional community of caring and support.

Now in this current time of reflection – we are still inspired by the Jesus who valued and cared for his close community of companions, and I hear more inspiration coming from the Jesus who called his followers to join him in immersing themselves in the world where Love and Justice are especially needed.

There is desire to be clearer about action and service, and creating a Vision and Purpose statement that keeps us engaged with the issues of our time.

We are asking ourselves --- what does it mean to love our neighbor? (Beautiful words, but what does it mean in concrete actions?)

What does it mean to protect human dignity, care for the earth, or advocate for change?

The more we focus our identity and intent as a faith community the more vital we become.

The Vision Team will continue their work and in time you can count on being engaged in the conversation. Even as we are in the midst of a transition with staff changes and the changes in the world around us --- rest assured that there is energy and hope here in this vital community of faith. And of course there is an eagerness to know what is next with Scott's departure.

(Sunday, April 23rd is his last Sunday with us)

Please know that nothing is going to happen quickly. Know that we will not be replacing Scott, because Scott and the ministry he did here were really very unique to Scott ---he is irreplaceable my friends. We will grieve Scott --- he has been a significant part of this congregation for 13 years, six of those as a staff member. We will miss him --- but we will not seek to "replace" him.

We are trusting that a new Vision/Purpose/Covenant statement will also help us understand what kind of staff model might work well for who we are and where God might have us go. **Be not afraid**...and feel free to talk with me or members of council --- please know that for right now, we do not know what it will look like and I invite you to trust the process of unfolding that will occur.

That being said, one thing we do know is that this fall we will welcome our second student from Seattle University, Marci Weis, who will be doing her final internship with us prior to graduating with her Masters of Divinity degree. Marci knows that she wants to be a parish pastor and is very excited to have the opportunity to be with us 8 to 10 hours per week, for six months.

She is a second career person, she is currently a Chief Operating Officer at a Healthcare company and so she brings excellent life experience with her as well as fresh enthusiasm for ministry and new ideas about how to be the church in this new age. All of her church experiences and internship learnings have been with men, in her words Marci states: “I am really looking forward to learning how a woman minister works alongside her church.” I believe the timing of this is no coincidence as we move forward into this new time.

The Jesus on the mountain gives testimony to the light that did “shine” in Jesus – and still shines as it guides even our congregation in this time of change. Let us remember that the ineffable and eternal truth in this story is what Jesus points us towards when he sends us back down the mountain to immerse ourselves in the world, not looking to be the best or to gain glory or riches– but to be vessels of light and love with courage and intention. Amen.