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Transfiguration

Psalm 50

The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks
and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.
Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.
Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire,
and a mighty tempest all around him.
He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people:
“Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”
The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Today is the last week of the Epiphany season, the last Sunday of our worship series focused on the “a ha” moments of discovering who Jesus was and continues to be for us today. Through Mark’s gospel, we’ve been delving deeply into the stories of Jesus’ baptism, healings, exorcisms, teaching, and now we read of his transfiguration on the mountaintop: when he shone with the light of God’s glory, stunning his disciples into awe and wonder. Light is the primary symbol for this epiphany season, beginning with the story of the wise men following starlight to the newborn Christ, and ending today with Jesus shining brightly on the

mountaintop. It's a season about revelation – what the light reveals, not only about Jesus, but about ourselves as well.

And so we turn to the light in our text today as we read, “Jesus was transfigured before them.” To be honest, I am not quite sure what that means. I wonder what it would have looked like. This is one of those places in the Bible where the Gospel writers paint a picture with words and it doesn't quite do it justice. Something happened that is more than can be described with words. Something was going on. Something unique that was captured in three of the four Gospels. We hear that there was this bright light coming from Jesus and there was this booming voice saying “This is my Son, listen to him.” Just like at his baptism, there is this empowering moment where God confirms the connection that Jesus holds with the divine. This Jesus is not just any man, but God's son, the beloved, and we are to listen and draw closer to God through him. On this mountaintop, we get a glimpse of the glory of God, a glory that we heard about in our Psalm too... It is a glory that shines brightly, even in the face of struggle and heartbreak, challenges in the road ahead.

This mountaintop experience follows directly on the heels of Jesus' first prediction of his suffering and death. And Peter, one of his closest and most faithful disciples, brushes the prediction off and rebukes Jesus. We, like Peter don't want to believe in the struggle, we don't want to face the darkness that lies ahead – we would rather believe that our faith can protect us from facing the challenges of life. But Jesus, confident in the abiding presence of the divine, goes to the mountaintop knowing full well what might happen when he comes back down, and is illuminated with the glory of God. Even though I don't fully understand what was going on up on that mountaintop, I believe that the take home message for us is that even when the road ahead is dark and uncertain, the love of God made known through Jesus can light the way, can illumine the darkness even within you. It is a moment where we are invited to let the light of God shine into OUR hearts as well. To hear the words, “follow me,” “listen to me,” put that light in your heart, walk through the darkness and I will lead you to new life.

As much as we would like to imagine our faith buffering us against all heartbreak and challenge, that's not reality. We, as individuals and as a society, struggle with the repercussions of sin and brokenness. God has blessed us with freedom of choice, free will, and we do not always live and choose as God would want us to. We live in the kingdom of MORE, the kingdom of ME, and while we pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,” we live in this space of hopeful anticipation, seeing moments, glimmers of God's Kingdom reality lived out in our midst, but that glimpse vanishes as we look upon the injustice and cruelty we see in our world. And it is as we face the darkness of the road ahead that the light of Christ, God's glory, shines brightest. Christ has come, the light is here. The transfiguration has happened and that word of hope and light is in us, we just need to open ourselves to it and let it shine forth. In this in between place, between kingdoms, WE are called to be that light. That prayer “Thy kingdom come,” is a call for US to live in the way of Jesus SO that Christ's light might shine through us even in the midst of the darkness.

In his fanciful “Theological ABCs” book *Whistling in the Dark*, Frederick Buechner muses on the Transfiguration this way: “[In the Transfiguration] it was the holiness of [Jesus] shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it that [the disciples] were almost blinded. Even

with us something like that happens once in a while. The face of a man walking his child in the park, of a woman picking peas in the garden, of sometimes even the unlikeliest person listening to a concert, say, or standing barefoot in the sand watching the waves roll in. Every once and so often, something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that it's almost beyond bearing" (Whistling in the Dark, Harper San Francisco, 1988, p. 108).

These every day, ordinary actions can be transformed by the Spirit of God to shine light and life back out into the everyday world. I believe that these moments of transfiguration happen, not only on mountaintops – or uber holy worship services or times of prayer – but in the everyday experience of relationship and faithful servanthood.

I believe that was the way with Jesus, as it is with us. When Jesus smiled kindly at lepers, looked pained to see a "sinner" being shunned by the Temple establishment, or after telling a shunned woman to go in peace because her sins were forgiven, there was a sense in which the disciples were seeing the face of the divine transfigured in those ordinary moments. Holy light shining forth in action, through what Jesus did, said, and taught.

The same is true for us! This shining light of God's presence shines from our eyes, our actions, and our words as we live out our faith in our everyday lives. When was the last time you shined your God-given light back into the world?

We have a God who takes us through the valley of the shadow of death. We serve a God who takes us into new life. Who moves us beyond our fear, beyond the darkness, to shine light, to shine hope, so that all may see the way of love, the way of God. Maybe your fears and darkness are different from this couple at McDonald's. Maybe your fears are health related or financial. Maybe your fears are about the future or your past catching up to you. Maybe your fears are not personal but about the world around us and the injustices we see. Whatever your fears are, know that Christ can take us beyond them! Hold on to your light and those indescribable moments where you have met God. As Christians who follow Jesus through his ministry and even to the darkness of the cross, we are called to not only hold on to the light to give us strength through the darkness but to also be the light to shine in others darkness.

I'll leave you with a poem I read this week entitled, ***Rusty lantern***

*I am a rusty lantern,
with its little corroded cap,
its bad latch,
its smudged, cracked glass,
its mottled handle bent to one side—
a plain old busted lantern.*

*None of this matters,
but the light that burns in it,
the candle of God.
I don't put the light there,*

*it's already there,
shining since the beginning of time.
I only marvel,
and walk around with that light in me,
silent, calm, reaching farther than I can know.
It shines,
and I wonder.*

Amen!