

“Perceptions of God’s Glory”

Luke 9:28-36

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Life is full of unexpected twist and turns, exhilarating highs and arduous lows. Through it all God reveals glory, grace, love, and joy to comfort, sustain, transform and renew each of us and the cosmos.

I began writing this sermon for March 3rd, Transfiguration Sunday. Kara got the flu and switched Sundays. Therefore, for those of you that follow the lectionary today is an unexpected twist – a transfiguration message in the midst of lent.

It has been a season with numerous twists and turns for the Yorks: My father’s surgeries; Leslie’s mom and sisters deciding to sell the family business, Hutman Heating, move her into a care facility, finding a care home, hospitals, transitional care, hospice, death, celebration of her resurrection; and Leslie continues to manage her mom’s finances as we try to sell the house and another business, the Commerce Center, 2 hours away. Today Leslie is with her sisters going through their mom’s belongings. An unexpected change at Leslie’s work has her and a co-worker doing the work of four people.

I was looking forward to our trip to Bend, Oregon. Mountains and hiking often enable me to perceive a glimpse of God’s glory. Perhaps clarity would emerge for our Reimagined Sundays. Perhaps I would discover how to be more comforting and supportive of Leslie. Perhaps I would be refreshed. It was the second to last day of our trip. Abigail was grieving the death of her dream of competing in a world cup for 2019. Our flight home was canceled. There was intense snow. It would have been easy to hunker down in our hotel room. The radar showed about a two-hour break in the snow. Earlier in the week I went on a delightful hike along the river. We bundled up. Scraped off the car. Slipped and slid to the trail head.

The trail was transformed. The red bark, and green needles of the towering trees stood out from the fresh white snow, like nature leaning in to hug us. The singing river an orchestra of sounds as the rocks sporting their new white garments jostled the dark dancing water. The snow cleansed the landscape causing the fresh pine scent to delight. Every so often, a jumbo flurry would sail sporting its unique geometric shape then land on my nose, tickling me as it melted. We entered an elegant cathedral, the floor was soft red pine needles, the walls were thousands of pine branches coated in sparkling snow, the ceiling layers of swaying green needles, the mist tasted like a snow cone on a hot summer day, there was sheer silence, it was a fortress of magnificence. We hiked on, not talking, yet enveloped with a deeper connection from the shared delight of the glory of God’s creation.

It was a transfiguration. This facet of God’s glory shifted my dreary thoughts to a surge of wonderful thoughts, times of shared love, joyful celebrations, snapshots of beauty, the harmony of laughter, memories of precious times with gracious people. I felt a belonging to the cosmos that made we feel light, undefined, fluid. I felt assurance that love endures forever, that resurrection awaits me and will reunite me with Leslie’s parents, sister and my mother. I sensed for every tear, heartache, and dashed dream that God has something grandeur for us to savor. God embraced the core of my being to assure me that God’s glory is in the process of making all glorious.

That was the sixth time I have had a profound perception of God’s glory. Each one followed a difficult time when I was freaking out over my circumstances and clueless as to what I should be doing. Each time I wanted time to stop, so I could stay in the moment forever followed by a desire to journey on to become a more loving, joyful, gracious person.

The ninth chapter of Luke is full of twists and turns, highs and lows. Jesus sends the disciples out to proclaim the good news. John the Baptist is killed. Jesus and the disciples feed a huge crowd. Jesus asks the disciples, “Who am I?”. Jesus predicts his death. The disciples were struggling, wrestling, questioning, grieving, confused. **Luke 9:28-36 NRSV “Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they**

had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Before the transfiguration the disciples got glimpses of God’s glory. Jesus healing all sorts of people physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Jesus welcoming outcasts, people from different religions, those with no faith at all, eating with tax collectors. Jesus welcoming children and women. Jesus nourishing people physically and spiritually. Jesus modeling and teaching about love, forgiveness and blessedness. An angel visiting Mary. Zechariah proclaiming that Jesus will save all. A multitude of angels proclaiming Jesus’ birth. God’s joyful voice upon Jesus’ baptism.

The disciples experienced numerous perceptions of God’s glory, yet they were still discouraged. People got angry at them, drove them out of Nazareth. Many religious leaders were discrediting, shaming, and threatening them. King Herod killed their friend and was hunting them. Their friends and family were still getting sick, needing care and dying. This constant travel, hunger, teaching, healing, forgiving, loving was grueling and exhausting. Despite all the good they were doing, oppression was still widespread, violence was everywhere, fear, hate, segregation, sexism, and ageism was rampant. Despite all their loving efforts, people were still starving, homeless, uneducated, and unemployed. The final straw was Jesus telling them he would soon die. They left everything to follow Jesus. They feared their lives and the world would completely unravel. All will be lost. We are all doomed. Many of us can relate to the disciples feeling, discouraged, overwhelmed, depressed, inadequate in the face of so much need, fear, violence, and hate.

Eight days later Jesus is transfigured. Eight days indicates a new week, it is a sign that something new, transformational, life changing, is happening, a transformed, rejuvenated, glorified creation is coming. Moses was there representing how God gives freedom from slavery, sin, oppression, violence, taking us on journeys to promised lands. Elijah was there representing all the prophets, how God speaks to us through thoughts, feelings, intuition, love, joy, peace, new born babies, family reunions, silence, sunsets, hugs, rainbows, a delicious shared meal, laughter, music, art, worship and jubilee. Moses and Elijah represented the numerous ways God forgives and lavishes peace, love, and joy upon us and the cosmos. Sadly, it is not enough the world is still a mess. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about resurrection, the coming kingdom of God to earth. They were talking about how our best perception of God’s glory is just a tiny, minuscule glimpse of the spectacular glory that is coming. Merely talking about the resurrected coming kingdom of God caused them to shine with a dazzling radiance that was soothing. God’s luminosity completed them, enabled them to see the grand wonder embedded in the cosmos, in others, in themselves. God’s sparkle revealed how all people would be resurrected, united, and rejoice in belonging together. God’s gleam revealed colors, sights, scents, sensations, tastes, sounds more robust, vibrant and fulfilling than anything they ever experienced.

In awe, Peter wanted to stay in that magnificent moment suffused with light. The disciples were unable to communicate the glory of that instant. That perception of God’s glory kept them going, sustained them, propelled them, inspired them to keep following Jesus, to keeping loving in the face of hate and fear, to keep being gracious, to keep making peace, to keep comforting victims of violence, to keep helping those stuck by disaster, to keep cheering the discouraged, because they were certain the glory of God is coming. Their perception of God’s glory resonated with the image of God within them, it revealed a new dimension of joyful love, it aroused a longing to shine with God’s glory, it transformed their daily life the way they care for others, clean a bathroom, walk, look at creation. Their perception of God’s glory moved them to bring rejuvenated life to those with hurts and needs, to declare that all people have equal value and are beloved by God. It encouraged them to live in the present like the guaranteed coming glorious kingdom of God had already been established. Later, Jesus’ resurrection revealed another facet of God’s coming glory to them, giving them words to proclaim God’s coming kingdom.

I hope you have been blessed with a transfiguration moment, an instant of awe, wonder, joy; a moment of laughter, grace, belonging; a flash of peace, love, transcendence; a thin place where the glory of heaven touched your soul reminding you of your glorious creation, reminding you of your glorious home in heaven,

reminding you that God's glory will permeate every fiber of your being uniting you with the cosmos in exuberant harmony.

If you have not had a transfiguration moment, then I hope you will hear a glimpse of transfiguration in an experience of someone around you, perhaps in Zion's baptism, maybe in Hands-On Mission, possibly in the variety of food we will enjoy today.

I suspect I miss most of the transfiguration moments God is shining on my life, because I am too worried, discouraged, bombarded with negative news, inundated with problems and overwhelmed with the ugliness, suffering, and pain of the world. I am grateful for you for the way you reveal God's glory to me in your stories, prayers, love, joy and service. My prayer for you, is a prayer I have for myself and all people, that everyone will have perceptions of God's glory that keeps them going, that all people will glimpse the coming glorious kingdom of God filling them with hope, that all people will be inspired to forgive, rejoice, love, and serve.

No matter the highs or lows, twist or turns of your life God is with you. God is redeeming you and the cosmos. God's glorious kingdom will be enjoyed by all for eternity. Let us celebrate the ways we shine today and imagine the ways we will shine for eternity. Amen