

Luke 9:28-36  
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“Transfiguration”

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One of the lessons of my sabbatical two years ago, was to relearn the power of silence and stillness. I still remember waking one day at La’akea, the intentional community I visited, and during morning announcements, as the bright sun was shining on our faces, one of the members of the community said, “I am going to a meditation event tonight, led by a Hawaiian Shaman, he will lead us to meditate on our Spirit Animal, let me know if you would like to go.”

Just as I was thinking “It can’t get much weirder than this,” I stunned myself by saying, “I’d like to go.” Once we arrived we chose our Spirit Animal, mine was a Humpback Whale. The shaman led us through a beautiful meditation where I imagined introducing myself to my new friend, talking with my friendly Whale, and swimming with my friend.

For about an hour we were allowed to simply be, to play in the warm gentle waters of the ocean, to imagine conversations about life and more. This may sound strange sitting here this morning, perhaps partly because many of us aren’t exposed to Hawaiian Shaman meditation, but I think this sounds strange also because we have been conditioned by a world where be-ing, is frowned upon. We are expected to spend every waking moment doing, producing, accomplishing our “to do” list, setting and achieving our goals... we are pressured every minute to contribute. We have become so busy there is precious little time for us allow God’s Spirit to till and open us to the fullness of its presence and power, and move us toward personal and social transformation.

I think the Transfiguration story today challenges this modern mode of operation. What happened on that mountaintop is mystery with a Capital M. The kind of Mystery which will not and should not be solved. The blazing light from Jesus, the voice of God from the Cloud (another ancient symbol of God’s presence), the appearance then disappearance of Moses and Elijah. It’s all Capital M mystery and this is the type of mystery needed to cultivate hope, faith, and forgiveness. James, Peter and John had seen the glory in the grey and their lives would never be the same.

The transfiguration challenges our cultural conditioning to, like Peter, rush to do something or say something; rush to try to preserve the moment instead of allowing it to happen. UCC Colleague Rev. fKate Matthews writes, “If Moses was told he couldn’t see God and live, perhaps Peter should have been told that he couldn’t see God and talk so much.” “Those of us,” she adds, “who think that every situation requires us to DO something, however well-intentioned our efforts, are called back to faithfulness by the voice of God, “This is my Son, my chosen, listen to him.”

This morning we might take to heart the words of Alan Culpepper, “Faithfulness is not achieved by freezing a moment; Faithfulness follows God in trust toward the Future.”

In these mountaintop times, or valley of suffering moments we find ourselves broken open, vulnerable, and deeply receptive to God's transforming love. It's the mystery of that moment standing at the communion table before we take the bread and cup. It's the moment of your baby's birth. It's the perfect sunset, or sunrise you feel so fortunate to be there to see. It's the perfect song at the perfect moment. Its unexpected tears of joy that overcome us, it's our heart sinking with compassion for another's suffering, and so much more.

As I reflected on times my life has been transformed by God, I tried to identify some common characteristics to those experiences. My experiences of God's mystery have included one or more of the following: 1) A powerful experience which I find difficult to put into words and impossible to pass on to someone else. 2) A moment when I find myself broken open by joy or compassion welling up from within... this I might describe as "being touched." 3) A time when the mystery of God helped me integrate realities which before seemed totally unrelated. 4) And, when the experience happened in a group, it is clear that not everyone in the group had the same depth of experience, if they had any at all.

Thomas Merton wrote, "We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time." How would you describe your experiences of God's mystery? Can you even identify them? How would you characterize times that have led to transformation? Or strengthening of Faith? Or healing? Or compassion?

So this morning, I pray the Transfiguration story might invite us to sunbathe in the mystery of God. Let's allow God's mystery to take its course, opening us to the possibility of surprising healing God may send, new directions God may guide, the little transformations that only come, as we use to say in the South, when we "set a spell" in the mystery of God.

When I find myself, like Peter, tempted to try to capture or seize God's Mystery... The lyrics of a chant help me remember to pause, and allow the presence of God to simply overcome me. The song is called, "Sweet Surrender..." and the lyrics say...

We are opening up in sweet surrender to the luminous love light of the One.  
We are rising up like a phoenix from the fire;  
Brothers and sisters spread your wings and fly higher!  
We are opening up like a lotus flower; Let the love light shine in our hearts tonight.  
We are rising up like the beat of the drum; beat by beat, we beat as one.

Amen