

Changed

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

Transfiguration Sunday - February 27, 2022

Texts: Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:1, 4:5-6, Luke 9:18-36

SCRIPTURE READING Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him....When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out.

SCRIPTURE READING 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:1, 4:5-6

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.... For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL READING Luke 9:18-36

Jesus began to warn his disciples of his impending arrest, persecution, and death. Then he said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he 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. Holy Wisdom, Holy Word. Thanks be to God.

God of glory, Christ shone upon the mountaintop. Cast the brilliance of your gospel into our hearts, that the light of Christ may shine in all we do. Amen



Jesus often went up the mountain to pray, alone. This time he took three disciples and they saw and heard and felt things they’d never known before. Was he preparing them for his suffering? Or for their own? Or was he teaching them that there is truth greater than the violence to come? Maybe they saw Jesus as he would look to them after his resurrection? Did Jesus really change?

Or were the disciples changed?

Carole Kinion Copeland taught me, “If you change the way you look at things- you change the way things look.”¹ Go one step further: If you change the way you look at things, are you changed, too? When Moses came down from the mountain with the 10 Commandments, his face was too bright to look at; he had to wear a veil to live among the people. In our New Testament reading we are told, when we look at God with “unveiled faces,” we too are transformed.

This week, I was nearly overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of war dominating the news. This on top of the disturbing visuals and voices in the trials revisiting terrible crimes. This on top of two years of covid, of faces veiled by masks. And the world kept feeling darker and more hopeless. And I kept wondering, Where is God in this?

And something inside me said, “Jan, are you even looking for God? Are you even listening?” So I tried. It was easy to see God in some things: the sunlight on the fresh snow. A new blossom on my hibiscus. The more you look for God, the more God shows up, I



¹ Carole was quoting Wayne Dyer.

learned.

I heard God in the voices of the women who gathered to watch the video “Not for Sale,” the true story of a man who lost everything - career, home, marriage - because he brought his anti-racist principles into his real estate business. The story was tragic, but the love and understanding shared afterward was God’s voice of love speaking into that sadness. I could hear God in them.

Sometimes I didn’t see God right away: like when Bob came in covered with snow and bleeding after a fall on the ice. My heart jumped right out of my chest to him. I imagine it’s a little like when your child comes to you hurt or crying, and even if you were mad at her ten minutes before, your love rushes out of you instantly. (To be clear, Bob isn’t a child, I wasn’t mad at him, and he is fine.)

Or the news from my sister and brother-in-law, who are with his sister for her last days and hours. How she said she’s ready to end her many years’ standoff with cancer: how she has come to see Death as a friend, not an adversary, Death’s coming as peace, not punishment. Wasn’t that the voice of God in her 5-year-old nephew telling her, “Have a nice life in heaven!”

If you have paid attention at all this week, you have seen too much violence, witnessed too much anguish, heard too much anger. Right now, pay attention to something bigger, stronger, more resilient. Where in this last week have you met God? Where have you heard God? Where have you seen God? Take a minute to stop and remember. What has opened your heart, or moved you to love? Then if you’d like to share a thought, please raise your hand. We’ll listen for those online first, then come back to those here



onsite.



*Thoughts shared: about Russian people protesting their governments brutal attack on Ukraine;
~about the serendipitous presence of a family friend when a member of the family, who otherwise would have been alone, experienced a bad fall that put her in the hospital. The teenaged friend was about to call the ambulance.
~about a new neighbor who offered a*

handwritten note of thanks when a member helped shovel her driveway.

~about the Rochester Orchestra’s performance of a piece that was, 90 years ago, the first by a Black woman composer to be premiered by a major orchestra; also a piece by Tchaikovsky,

highlighting the beauty that Russia has brought to the world; and the first Black woman candidate for the Supreme Court, announced this week as President Biden's pick. Many more God sightings were thought of but not spoken aloud.

We have also seen the love of God at work as the world reaches out in love and compassion to Ukraine, a nation wounded and fighting for its life.

Why do we go up the mountain? Why do we visit sacred places? Not to stay there; not to build a permanent home, but to be changed, to learn to know God's voice, and recognize God's Light, so that when we return, as we must return, to the valley where fear and pain and sadness overshadow our lives, we can see the light of God's glory there, too. There is no place where God is not, no situation so grim God cannot enter, no person so lost that God cannot find them. In the weeks to come, through this season of Lent pray that your eyes may see and your ears may hear the Holy One speaking to you. And in you. And through you. May you be changed. Amen.

Prayers²

For all who feel vulnerable and afraid: those in Ukraine, trans kids and their families, for all suffering amid war and violence, for all who feel forgotten: grant them courage, strength and the true peace of knowing they are beloved.

For those who abuse their power, for those drunk on arrogance, for those who wield their strength with disregard for human dignity, for those inflamed by deceptive pride: grant them humility, restraint, and the true peace of knowing they too are beloved.

For all who feel overwhelmed, who wish to help but feel powerless to do so, for those trying to bear witness to your voice and your light: grant them wisdom, comfort that is not complacency, and the true peace of knowing they are beloved.

For those who are sick or sad or lonely, especially those in our intimate circle: and all who are nearing death. Grant them all the true peace of knowing they are beloved.

Remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray always:

Heart of heavenly love, hallowed be your name. Your harmony come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And let us not be led into temptation but deliver us from evil, for the peace, the potential, and the praise are yours, now and forever. Amen

² I am indebted to my friend Heidi Wagner, who shared some of these prayers with me, source unknown.