

Matthew 17:1-9

Show the Brightness of Your Face

Each morning when I get up I am drawn to the morning light. The long nights of winter are difficult for me as I long for the morning sunshine to waken my soul. There is something about the sun shining, even on a very cold and frosty morning, that can make one look forward to the day. Maybe it is hope.

The sun brings a sense of newness and a spirit that is lighter. When our hearts are troubled or our bodies weakened by illness, darkness seems to be our companion whether figuratively or literally. You might find yourself closing the blinds or curtains, staying in the safety of your bed.

Light has a way of waking the senses, especially a shining light whether it be the sun, moon, stars, or a spotlight on a stage. In art, photography, or even in a play or movie it is not the person or object itself that often gets our attention first, but rather the way light illumines the person or object. Light transforms things.

Light has a big role to play in the words of scripture. Light is used to reference how God is revealed and used to describe God's character. It is used in reference to Jesus birth at the beginning of Matthew 5:16 "the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." Jesus even uses light to describe himself. In John 8:12 we hear, "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John uses the image of light to speak about Jesus right from the first chapter and onward.

So it should not be surprising to us that Jesus being transfigured on this mountain top, with Peter, James, and John as witnesses, is described with the words, "And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." (17:2) How else would the "Light of the World" be manifest?

Some people get stopped by this piece of scripture. Their need for scientific explanation does not allow them to accept the story. They want to explain it. But what if we didn't concern ourselves with the explanations and rather sat in the mystery of it. Three people witnessed this transformation. Peter years later writes about the transfiguration as he assures those who are living their faith and struggling with it, he assurance them that he was there to see this man Jesus transfigured in shining light before his very eyes.

At the time it was disorienting. In the moment Peter was trying to figure it out, make sense of it. By wanting to make three dwellings, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah,

Peter was attempting to be a part of what was going on. His Jewish upbringing helped him to understand that God was present in the moment. He remembered that God had once dwelled with the people in a tent in the wilderness. Maybe he thought this was like that moment.

We know that somewhere along the line, in the last three years of following Jesus, Peter had seen enough to convince him that Jesus was the Messiah. He stated that six days before. He got in trouble because he wanted to protect Jesus from the death that Jesus was foretelling in that moment days before, and Jesus said that Peter was a stumbling block if he didn't let Jesus face what was to be faced. To be sure there was no way that Peter could have fully understood what he was faced with whether when rebuking Jesus for saying that he had to die or now as he watched this man in all of his humanness shine.

Only in hindsight, after this experience of transfiguration, and the horrible excruciating death on a cross, then the resurrection, of Jesus, only then and years later as Peter processed all that he had been a part of he could say emphatically, "...we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'" (2 Peter 1:16-17)

Matthew too, is writing about this experience of the transfiguration at a time much after it actually happened. He heard of it from those who had been present, the three disciples that he had walked with in those early years of ministry. And now, knowing that those he was teaching and leading were weary and feeling defeated, that they needed to hear those same words of reassurance that Jesus received from God on that mountain top, Matthew writes about the moment that Jesus' face shone, his clothes became dazzling white, and the voice of God spoke in such a way that it brought the men down to the ground.

One can imagine that hearing the voice of God in such a manner would strike fear and trembling into their entire being. And then Jesus without fanfare or rebuke touched them and said, "Get up and do not be afraid." (17:7)

It might be tempting to disregard this story, but could it be that Jesus is shining brighter than ever in our lives and calling us now to be the light that shines in the lives of others? This is a calling certainly as individuals but also as a community of faith and maybe even more so as a community of light and love. A place where people can find light in a dark world. A place where people are restored to wholeness and become light themselves. Don't discount how light can shine from you.

Transfiguration Sunday comes as the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany, a season where we celebrate the light that has come into the world, into our lives, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This Wednesday ushers in the Season of Lent, a time of preparation as we approach Easter. But what are we being prepared for? I would suggest that we are being prepared again and again to be the people of God in the

world. The light of Christ for others. Can you imagine the glow if each of us undertook being light in the world? If our faces shone with brightness because of our faith in God, the love of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us?

Now imagine that light bursting through the walls of this building because it shines so brightly, is so dazzling that it breaks through the cracks of this structure and radiates in splendour from this place. That is the power of God's love. When we love as a community, we can transform lives.

We think we have little to offer. We wonder what we can do. And those are questions that need to be pondered. Don't avoid those questions. Don't be afraid to show love, to shine brightly, to burst through the darkness of lives with the brightness of your face and the face of this congregation.

Jesus' face is always shining, transformed by the resurrection power of God. We may not see it directly, but we know when that resurrection power is shown in the brightness of our face, the face of the church that is all about bringing light and life to the world. If we stop shining who will shine?

We shy away from the brightness. Maybe it is because it is too much for us. Maybe because we are afraid or overwhelmed to the point that we find ourselves on the ground, not sure when to get up or how to get up. The world would have us stay there. Don't stay there. Stand up.

Jesus is near and with a touch of his hand says to us, "Get up and do not be afraid." Do not be afraid. Though the writing seems to be on the wall for the Christian faith, our budgets say that things are tough going, and the pews around us are not as full as they once were, Jesus says, "Get up and do not be afraid."

Early in Matthew Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (5:14-16)

Let Jesus shine in the brightness of our face and together as God's people we can transform ourselves, our congregation, and our community. Dream big, shine brightly, and do not be afraid.