

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
Transfiguration Sunday - February 19, 2023

Words of Welcome

Welcome to worship. This Sunday is also known as Transfiguration Sunday and the scripture and message will explore this theme.

We begin with a responsive call to worship.

Call to Worship

 (inspired by Mark 9:2-9, Matthew 17:1-9)

God, we come to the mountaintop to be covered in your presence.

**We are comforted by your holiness and your glow;
we are comforted by the hope of the mountain top,
where you are so close, so accessible,
where there is no doubt of your glory.**

The mountain top reminds us why we worship you.

We witness your bright power, and your plan for the nations of the earth.

As we prepare for worship, God bring us to the mountain top; bring us to the mountain top so that we may be inspired to do your work in the valley below.

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women of the United Methodist Church. <http://www.gcsrw.org/Portals/4/WHM.worshipMarch2.pdf>

Hymn

Before the world began

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|---|---|
| 1. Before the world began
one Word was there;
grounded in God he was,
rooted in care;
by him all things were made;
in him was love displayed;
through him God spoke, and said,
"I am for you." | 2. Life found in him its source;
death found its end;
light found in him its course,
darkness its friend,
for neither death nor doubt
nor darkness can put out
the glow of God, the shout:
"I am for you." |
| 3. The Word was in the world
which from him came;
unrecognized he was,
unknown by name;
one with all humankind,
with the unloved aligned,
convincing sight and mind,
"I am for you." | 4. All who received the Word
by God were blessed;
sisters and brothers they
of earth's fond guest.
So did the Word of Grace
proclaim in time and space
and with a human face,
"I am with you." |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of grace and wonder,
you reveal your presence in so many different ways.

Your glory glistens on snowy mountain tops and sparkling streams.
Your mercy moves in classroom conversations and bedside prayers.
Your word of comfort frees us from fear; Your voice can transform our doubts.
We come before you in worship to dwell in your goodness and seek your truth,
as we offer all praise and honour to you.

**God of mystery and mercy,
we confess we sometimes mistake our own desires for your will.
We are reluctant to hear a word that challenges our assumptions.
We seek assurances that we are right, and resist insights from the
experience of others. Forgive us, O God. Shape our will to yours,
so we can dwell more closely with you and with one another.**

God of Word and Wisdom, your Spirit inspired the authors of Scripture with faithfulness in their day. Send us your Holy Spirit as we listen to the Scriptures in our time. Give us fresh understanding and a vision of how to live out your wisdom in the example of Christ, your living Word. Amen

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Assurance of Forgiveness

On mountaintops and in valleys, in moments when our lives are shrouded and as well as when we reflect Christ's light, God is with us, declaring we are the beloved!

©2023 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> February 19.

Scripture Reading Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message 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 be 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.

Prayers of the People

It is a strange time of year, O God.

We linger between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent.

We are between the joy of your appearing and the horror of your undoing at the hands of those who would not or could not embrace your way of life.

Perhaps we – like Peter, James, and John – wait for your appearing in dazzling light and unmistakable clarity: We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the way through the mix and mess of this life.

Our planet is fragile and so is the life that claims it as home. We wonder how long we can simply take what we want with little regard for what it costs your creation.

We wonder if the planet is crying out for relief in the floods that are really tears; the earthquakes that try and shake our consciousness; the gales that blow sighs, too deep for words.

Renew and restore a vision of care for your creation.

Remind us to take what we need and no more.

Encourage us in a counter-cultural faithfulness

that is not about consumerism. Spur us with new insight and deeper understanding that we may live mindfully each day, conscious of the impact of we do and fail to do.

We pray for the people of the world whose names we will never know, whose faces flash across the TV screen in anonymity born of numbers; those who bear the weight of earth's pain.

We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the truth – the truth that love is stronger than hate; peace is possible; and life can emerge even in the midst of devastation.

We pray for that truth to be known.

We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the life; inviting us to follow in his footsteps as he trod the way of love and justice, inviting us to follow him in prayer as he lived out his faith and made You known.

We give thanks for the good news that unfolds in the world as people dream your dreams, follow your nudging, and seek you in the faces they meet each day.

Perhaps, O God, it is the only Transfiguration we really need.

For all those who are quiet witness to your love and way of life, we give thanks, O God.

Draw us to the rhythm of Lent as it unfolds in our midst; a sacred invitation to explore the corners of our soul.

Open us to your light that we might see ourselves clearly, with all our fears and faults and faith, with all our desires and dreams and duties.

Help us to see our journey as a place of your appearing – that like Peter, James, and John we may come down from the mountain and set one foot in front of the other.

~ from **World in Prayer**, a ministry of the Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist, Lodi, California, USA. <http://www.worldinprayer.org/>

And now joining together we pray as Jesus taught...

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to the offering

God reached out to the world in Christ Jesus, calling us to share God's transforming love. We offer our gifts as a sign of our readiness to follow him, praying they will become tangible tokens of that transforming love.

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Hymn

We've a story to tell to the nations

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1. We've a story to tell to the nations
that shall turn their hearts to the right,
a story of truth and mercy,
a story of peace and light,
a story of peace and light,
for the darkness shall turn to dawning,
and the dawning to noonday bright,
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
the kingdom of love and light.
2. We've a song to be sung to the nations
that shall lift their hearts to the Lord,
a song that shall conquer evil
and shatter the spear and sword,
and shatter the spear and sword,
for the darkness shall turn to dawning,
and the dawning to noonday bright,
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
the kingdom of love and light
3. We've a message to give to the nations,
that the Lord who reigneth above
hath sent us his Son to save us,
and show us that God is love,
and show us that God is love,
for the darkness shall turn to dawning,
and the dawning to noonday bright,
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
the kingdom of love and light.

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Benediction

We have witnessed Christ, God's Beloved, on the mountain in glory.
Now, go into the world to shine the light of his glory with grace and compassion.
May God's beauty inspire you; May Christ's brilliance restore you;
And may the joy of the Holy Spirit empower you to shine in every place you go.

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