

Feb. 26, 2017 Transfiguration Luke 9:28-45

“Bit by bit, the story unfolds, revealed in word and deed to those who choose to see with open hearts and minds.” Thus begins our invitation to this morning’s Gospel Story—the story known as “The Transfiguration.” Something about that introduction captures my imagination. I think we could just as truly say, “Bit by bit, the story unfolds, revealed in word and deed,” not only “to” but also “through,” “those who choose to see with open hearts and minds.”

How do we open our hearts and minds to the sacred story unfolding before us, within us, among us?

That was the challenge faced by Peter, James and John as they found themselves on the Mountaintop that day. That is the challenge we speak of today when we speak of discerning the way ahead, or seeking and finding a vision, for ourselves as individuals, as a congregation, and as a part of a wider community.

One way might be to stop from time to time and ask ourselves, questions like: “What it is that opens our hearts, and inclines us to reaching out to one another, or to those beyond our own?” “What is it that speaks to us of purpose?” “What is it that makes our hearts sing?” “What lights us up?”

We might also ask consider questions like: “What is it that closes our hearts down, inclines us to withdraw, caring only for ourselves and maybe (on generous days) those closest to us?” “What sucks the life out of us?”

Paying attention in this way to our inner responses to the events of our personal lives, and our life together can help us find the way forward both individually and as a community! We need, from time to time, to stop, observe, and take note of our inner responses to life as it unfolds.

This week, during a conversation with a guest to our building, I heard something like this, “Your building is so beautiful and welcoming. It is almost as if you’re ready and waiting to see who will come through the doors and what will happen next. It speaks to me of possibility.” Another responded saying, “I would love to see us grow—I would love for this building become a vibrant hub in our community.” Both expressed excitement at the possibilities that might open out before us as a church. It was wonderful to see our space anew through their eyes, and to have conjured before us the possibility that our church might be transfigured -- that the light of God might shine through us, what we say and those things that we do -- in new and awesome ways.

Transfiguration Sunday is a hinge Sunday of the Church year. It is the final Sunday of Epiphany during which we focus on the question, “Who is this one who has come to be among us? Who is this one we hope to follow?”

On the first Sunday of Epiphany, we read the story of Jesus’ baptism, and on this last Sunday of Epiphany we hear the story of the Transfiguration. The Scriptures for each of those two Sundays feature a Voice from Heaven. At Jesus’ baptism, the voice speaks directly to him, “You are my son, who I love. I am well pleased with you.”

On that Sunday, we are reminded that Jesus comes among us as one of us, and by his presence, his words and deeds, he reveals the good news that all of us are also God’s beloved sons and daughters. He feeds the human longing to know Divine love and blessing mediated through human presence, touch and word. Now, at the Transfiguration, the Heavenly Voice speaks again—this time to Peter, James, and John saying, “This is my Son, my chosen. Listen to him!” And so it is, as we end the season of Epiphany and enter the Lenten Season, we are reminded to listen to the voice of Jesus—even as he makes his way to the cross—and beyond.

After his baptism, Jesus goes into the desert and prepares to begin his ministry in the world. The disciples do the same after hearing that mountaintop assurance and command. For Peter, John, and James, “Affirmation happens on a mountaintop: bright and blinding and as mysterious as it is glorious.” Those long ago disciples, “are suddenly, astonishingly fully awake. Hearing echoes of stories long ago, of Moses and of Elijah on other storied mountains-- as they watch the shining face of Jesus—transformed,

transfigured..." "...The moment passes, and they head back down the next day. Crowds press once more, healings and mercy sought after. And in quiet conversation, transfiguration moves on, to betrayal."

* Jesus said it clearly, "Let these words sink into your ears: the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands." --these words providing a kind of preparation they had never expected or hoped to hear.

As we begin the season of Lent, having explored the question, "Who do you say that I am?" we begin to intentionally listen for the voice of Jesus, and to discern the way ahead for ourselves and for our congregation. Along the way we might also ask, what must die that we might truly live?

In the coming months, we will be seeking to gain some clarity around who we are, and what we are called to be, say and do as the people of God at Manor Road United Church— not only here amongst ourselves, but in partnership with those in the broader community. Each one of you will be given opportunities to participate in various ways in this season of listening as we work to prayerfully and purposefully discern our way ahead. Bit by bit, our story unfolds, revealed in word and deed-- by and through-- those who choose to see with open hearts and minds.

***Spill the Beans**, Issue 21 2016 - spillbeans.org.uk, www.facebook.com/spillbeansresources, pg. 118 - 122.

Longing To See

Show yourself, God!
Let me see—let me see you!

Oh the years I longed for just one moment when I would know.

Maybe we all have that longing. Maybe we all, secretly, want to be that special person who will have that extraordinary divine encounter.

Imagine if it really happened.

Imagine actually seeing God. A glimpse of God, even.

A moment of seeing beyond, being in the full wonder of God's presence. No more doubting!

You would know for sure, because you had seen with your own eyes. God—for real!

What if it really happened?

You would be changed.

You would know.

From that moment on, everything would be different!

If only I could see you, God;
if only you would give me that one, clear, unmistakable, perfect moment. Catch me at my godly best, captivate me in my holiest state of serenity, and show yourself...

Then it happened. Here's how it happened...

Right when I couldn't pray,
couldn't stay awake, couldn't rest.

Head full of questions and eyes full of sleep.

A sudden, jealous, glance towards Jesus,
wondering how he could pray.

Watching him.

I know what I saw.

The light in his face, in his clothes,
all of him, pure light...
and two figures appearing out of nowhere,
two men standing there, talking to him.
The three of them all in this pure light,
yet just standing there, talking!
I knew who they were.

And I knew this was it—my moment—
my glimpse of God.

And I wanted to hold it, to keep it,
to have it again.

I said we should make shelters,
make shrines,
do something special.

But...

no time to treasure it, to take it in,
before we were swallowed in a great cloud.

No ordinary cloud.

A great shadow that shot fear through me
like waves of heat and cold.

Then as deep as the terror,
a voice as pure as that light
and I know what I heard.

I know who I heard.

Then it was over.

We were alone again.

The scrubby hillside,
the cool air,
the four of us,
no one saying a word.

Has it changed me?

I don't know.
What feels different?
I don't know.
Will be there no more doubting?
I doubt it.
What did I think I would be sure of,
from that one, sacred, longed-for moment?
God, I really don't know!
a voice as pure as that light,
and I know what I heard.
I know who I heard.

Then it was over.
We were alone again.
The scrubby hillside, the cool air,
the four of us,
no one saying a word.

Has it changed me? I don't know.
What feels different? I don't know.
Will there be no more doubting? I doubt it.
What did I think I would be sure of,
from that one, sacred, longed-for moment?
God, I really don't know...!