

Exodus 34:29-35 ~ Luke 9:28-43a  
*This is What Shared Glory Looks Like*  
Transfiguration of the Lord ~ March 3, 2019  
The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

*Introduction to Scripture:*

Two Sundays ago, remember where we were? (Sign with arms) – Down on the Sermon on the Plain, Part 1. Last Sunday, when God’s ice then snow storm descended at exactly the wrong time for those of us hoping to have church, would have been Sermon on the Plain, Part 2. Today we get to go up the mountain with Jesus and 3 of his disciples. And we will also go down again. In Luke’s telling of the Transfiguration story, the up story and the down story together paint a vivid picture of Christ’s glory that prepare us as we head into Lent this Wednesday. Let’s follow this whole glory story and see what light it can shine deep into the corners of our hearts.

*Sermon:*

When I heard that the Deacons were hatching a plan to bring “Great Scott the Magician” here on Transfiguration Sunday, of all the Sundays in the year, I thought, “Wow!” This is amazing how their plans to punch up the excitement for this year’s annual “Everybody’s Birthday Party” with a magician would occur on Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday. The one Sunday in the year when we ponder a gospel story that surely falls into the realm of “magical realism.” Think about what happened: First we have the long dead Moses and Elijah appearing to and talking with Jesus; then we have Jesus’ face and clothes light up, next at Peter’s suggestion of building booths for the three of them [cue the fog machines]: here comes a cloud instantly engulfing all of them, and a voice thunders from the cloud, “This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him” then poof all that is gone: back to regular Jesus with his regular face and clothes along with his three disciples plodding back down the mountain with their gritty, sweaty sandal straps digging into their toes. The pixie dust of “Magical realism” according to Luke is sprinkled generously in this story. Our Bible contains a lot of wild and crazy stories that shimmer with the supernatural.

However, some of us may feel a little uncomfortable with the idea of magic in church. I happen to think we could use a little more magic in church—not less. Let me explain what I mean. I’m talking about magic in its original sense: magic as *change that occurs by supernatural powers to make impossible things happen*. Doesn’t that sound like God’s glory at work? Like God raising Jesus from the dead, for example? Our formation story as Christians and central to our theology. Did you know that the term, “hocus pocus” is a derivative of the words spoken in the Latin Mass for “This is my body”? The words are “Hoc est corpus meum.” Say that three times quickly and what do you get? Experiencing the presence of Christ, as we break bread and share the cup, the communion of his body and blood could be described as “supernatural.” Yes: I’m all in for supernatural change that reconfigures the world to look even a little more like a world where Jesus became one of us to mirror for us the super supernatural power of Divine Love and Glory. You know, a world where it looks Love *is* winning and hate *is* losing.

Out transfiguration text today, starts out so shiny and brilliant with a more than a dash of magic but then it startles us with an ugly jolt of realism down at the bottom of the mountain. The disciples could not heal the tormented boy. No magic there. A botched attempt at a healing, and then a human burst of impatience from Jesus, right there in the text we see him lament, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?” And *then* he healed the boy. I know I prefer to jump over Jesus’ outburst and instead thrill at his shiny, healing moment. But the two work together – for Jesus and for us. From the shadow of the boy’s torment, and Jesus’ impatience, we see the glory of God at work. As much as we love the razzle dazzle mountain vision moments, I hear a call to chase down the light at the back of our impatience. God’s glory waits there too. The glory of Jesus was never more evident than his agony and death on the cross. When we disconnect or disassociate the Spirit from the darkness, we are short circuiting if not disconnecting from the full power and glory of God. Yes, the supernatural power of God’s love.

Last Sunday afternoon, because of the ice and snow storm that blew across our region last weekend, the power went out on our block at about 4:00 p.m. It was not restored until 1:00 p.m. on Monday. Close to 24 hours of now power. And my husband Bob, the fixer of mechanical things in our household, is away teaching in Utah. Thankfully we have a generator that runs on gas fuel like a lawn mower. And I had an instructional video Bob and made for me before he left. We also have great neighbors who helped me fire it up. But then the gas ran out and the generator stopped about 9 p.m. So I had a long, dark, night. And I gained a new appreciation for the sunrise and the light it gives to all of us including me on my way to the gas station. How else could I make my coffee?

Here’s the connection with our transfiguration story: being cut off from electricity is hard, but fixable. And for those of us in this country, usually temporary. But being cut off from the power and glory of God’s love kills the soul and it can literally kill the body. The rising epidemic of suicide and opioid overdose death shouts this truth. People crying out silently from the shadows by the thousands in our country, feeling desperately alone. Far from any hope or glory. They do not know the Lord has laid his hands upon them. Or they forgot. Not unless someone shares God’s glory, God’s love with them. Cut off from the source, one loses all hope.

How far away is the generative Love of God? Borrowing from the Celts, Christians talk about *thin* places, “Heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in thin places that distance is even shorter,” so the Celtic saying goes. In this story we are treated to an exquisite on top of the mountain moment where the distance becomes so thin, the veil is lifted, for a moment. Moses and Elijah, having made their mark and their departures from this earth, are speaking with Jesus about his departure, his exodus. Perhaps they preparing him in some way for his agony on the cross, his departure, his death, *the* death, that would tear open the temple of the curtain, narrowing the distance between heaven and earth for all of us.

Jesus accomplished his departure, this one they were talking about on the mountain to show the very real magic, if you will, of God’s power to heal our wounds, by *sharing our pain*. Shiny Jesus, disfigured Jesus, healing, transfiguring the convulsing boy and giving him back to his father. These combined images illuminated for his bewildered, dismayed, and perhaps

discouraged disciples that day a key truth. A truth we need to hear and embody this day. The supernatural power of God's glory is only possible here on earth if it is shared.

Moses didn't know his face was shining until Aaron and the Israelites told him. Did Jesus know his face had changed? I wonder. God's glory, whether on the mountaintop or in the shadows happens when it is shared. God's glory depends on keeping the vision, not by building a booth around it but by letting that vision lead us into the shadows where those who are in pain, disfigured, distorted by the ravages of injustice are waiting. Here are just a few in the shadows this day, right now:

- There are at least 30 parents at the southern border of our country trying desperately to be reunited with their children who were taken from them when they were seeking asylum in the USA last summer.
- There are people languishing in prison with little hope for parole primarily because of their poverty or their skin color.
- Our earth is crying out to us, as climate change threatens the ecosystem upon which we all depend. The people and animals already most effected by these changes are those without the means or ability to change their location or circumstance.

Jesus is there with them, in them. To let Jesus shine, we are called to do what we can together to heal, to transfigure – them and ourselves in the process. This is what shared glory, God's glory looks like for us. We cannot shine without one another.

At our session visioning retreat yesterday morning, one of our elders remarked, "You never know where the magic will come from." This was toward the end of our time together, as we were discussing our mission statement, trying to take an honest look at which parts we were fulfilling and which parts needed more attention. Look at the front of your bulletin it's printed in the box—skip to the middle you will see it front and center: "We will be agents of God's transforming power, aligning ourselves with the Holy Spirit." This is the super power given to us to transfigure our "faithless and perverse generation." This is no "sleight of hand" trick, where we're warned, "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain" as we see the dog Toto, grabbing the curtain hiding the false wizard in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Rather, we are called to be agents of the true God who chose to enter the deepest shadows of humanity, departing by way of the cross, to tear the curtain between heaven and earth, if even just for an instant. That is the God for whom we at FPC are called to be agents--right here in Marshfield at the bottom of the mountain.

This elder was absolutely spot on: we never know where the magic will come from, but we do know from where it comes: our Creator-Redeemer-Sustainer. The One who has chosen to depend on us to share the glory.

