

John Sampson
"Light Revealed"
Text: Mark 9:2 - 9
Preached at KVCC
February 11, 2018

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Painted with light.

On that high mountain, at the meeting point of heaven and earth, Jesus' clothes and body are washed in the golden light of God's presence.

And Jesus' disciples don't know what to do with what they witness.

Or is it actually the inverse that happens on that lonely summit?

Is it that the clothes and the skin are wiped away in that moment? Instead of heavenly light being added, is the dust and brokenness of humanity actually removed to reveal a deep and brilliant truth?

And hearing this story are we, those who try to follow Jesus and his message today, also at a loss by the vision of glory we see in our mind's eye?

This is the story of transfiguration.

This is a story about bodies, our bodies, their truth, and our confused response to that truth when it is finally revealed to us.

This story of the transfiguration is often positioned as the final story in the season of Epiphany. It is the final story of Jesus and his ministry before we enter the shadowy season of Lent. But what if we pushed the timeline up a bit. What if we made this story of the radiance of Jesus' body the introduction to Lent, and its brokenness? What new insight could we gain about ourselves, about the story of Jesus and his final journey to Jerusalem, and about the blasphemy of the cross?

I think if we make this leap we receive the answer, before we hear the question.

Before we set one single foot on the journey of our Lenten pilgrimage, we see first a body, a human body, saturated with God's presence, and enfolded in the Divine light. Jesus stands between heaven and earth, and participates in both of them. And he shows us that we do too. Made in God's image, born of the earth, we stand on that mountaintop right along with our teacher. And we see that the transfiguration, the revelation of the intrinsic holiness of humanity, is not just the story of the Other; it is our story. But by seeing it first in the Other, this story trains us to see God's presence in ourselves, and in each other, and in all of humanity. And in this moment we can believe that we are all children of God.

But in the very next moment, just like the disciples who followed Jesus up that mountain, we can be reduced to fear and confusion. We can behave as if we never witnessed the revelation of the transfiguration, and move right into the works that mark our Lenten journey. We can forget the glory of what it means to be human and act selfishly, strike out in anger and violence, and support the laws and systems, and organizations and economic structures that lead us and others on our own journey to Jerusalem and the ultimately to a cross of our own making.

I said if we moved up the timeline and thought of our story of transfiguration as not the end of Epiphany, but as the start of Lent that we would hear the answer before the question.

Journeying through Lent we will ask ourselves about the value of human life, if the ends justify the means, if love is really stronger than hatred, if there is any redemption for those who break the most fundamental covenants that order our lives and our societies. These will be our questions.

And before each of these questions, there he stands, bathed in golden light, a projection of our own innate sacredness. There before us stands the transfigured Jesus.

And this image, this icon of humanity is not so much a thing, as it is a location. In the revelation of transfiguration humanity is revealed to be the meeting place of heaven and earth. And in this image we are all glorified, and sanctified, and made holy.

And this is not some kind of abstract truth, but an embodied reality.

I have been holding this small bowl in my hands for this entire reflection.

It contains a paste made of 24 kt gold. It was made out of gold dust and bound together with olive oil.

Gold has traditionally been used in illuminated manuscripts not only to bring luxury and great value to certain passages, but also to reflect light. Because of this quality it became a symbol of God's presence where it was used.

Olive oil was used in Jesus' time for cooking, but also for healing, and marking those bodies chosen for special roles and responsibilities in the community and before God.

By combining gold and olive oil together in this cup I've made a paste that is a symbol of God's presence and commitment, a marker of sanctity and great value, a salve of beauty and of light.

And I want to share it with you.

I invite each of you, as you feel called, to come forward and be anointed this morning with a mark revealing your participation in the revelation of the transfiguration. I will use this paste and sign a cross on your forehead to proclaim that you are a beloved child of God, that you are holy, and that your humanity has a value that can never be overthrown, no matter what life brings you, no matter what others may say or do to you. This anointing reveals the truth that is present today, and tomorrow and always. It reveals a truth that will be with us on every step of our Lenten journey.

So come forward, if you would like.

Come down the center aisle, and I will anoint you, and then return to your seats by one of the side aisles.

Come and be transfigured!

[Anoint]

Now look around. Look at all who have been gilded today. Look at all of the light and shimmering beauty in this room. This is the answer to all of the harsh reality of Lent, and of our lives. Look around and see the children of God revealed.

[Sing Alleluia]

AMEN.