

Sermon notes: Feb 23, 2020

Focus: Transfiguration

All readings https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Epiphany/AEpiLast_RCL.html

Matthew's story of the transfiguration (glowing Jesus on a mountaintop) alludes to a lot of scripture. To follow the trail of breadcrumbs, here are some notes.

Mountains and light When you hear about mountains, something is afoot. Throughout the Bible, mountains are full of shiny lights, clouds, and teaching. In a contrast relevant to today's text, the author of darkness (the devil) had previously led Jesus up temptation mountain (chapter 4). In chapter 17 today, the transfiguration mountain is where the father of lights embraces Jesus. (reversal images like this are all over the Bible.)

Today's story has many biblical cross references.

- Jesus is like Moses - Exodus 34
- He's heavenly - Daniel 7
- He shines like the sun - Matthew 13
- His bright white appearance alludes to a future hoped for - Revelation 7

Up the mountain, light, down the mountain

Quick summary of Matthew 17:

verses 1-4 - shiny lights

verse 5 - God speaks

verse 6 - disciples respond as best they could

verse 7-9 - Jesus commissions them and go down.

Reflecting the shine — Moses and Elijah

- They already had their mountaintop experience with God
- Both were commissioned to share God's love in the face of hostility
- They confirmed God's continued use of Jesus in the face of those opposed to God's will
- Light around the mountain was Jesus' vindication of his mission to share love - even in death

We are part of the story too. This God of light inspires **us** to be reflections of light.

Now — Peter He's not as silly as he might seem at first. His offer to make a holy camp out with Jesus can evoke church chuckles. However, Peter's offer to make dwellings for Moses, Elijah and Jesus is a reference to:

- Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25 and it will be picked up in Hebrews 9.)
- Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33 and later in 2 Corinthians 5)
 - These are two places where God had shone.

Peter was drawing on his Jewish upbringing to participate in God's fullness. Instead of trying to limit God, Peter had the privilege of setting the stage (even if it was in his own meager tent pitching skills)

The three are dumbfounded the three disciples all fall apart at the shining light because the burden of this Transfiguration is too much to bear. Jesus' final instructions have seemed a little dumbfounding, overly stern to me: he tells his friends to be quiet until he dies.

What if you changed the tone of these words in your mind? What if Jesus wanted the three to guard their precious experience closely? Maybe he wanted them / us to treasure the holy experience instead of blabbing it all away. When we overwork our holy experiences, we often don't keep the spiritual gas tank full enough to handle the suffering ahead.

Practice guarding your spiritual life now Like I mentioned last week. Check your speech before you talk. As a spiritual discipline, Is what you are going to say *True, Kind and Necessary*? If so, speak your peace. If not, be quiet in God, you'd be surprised what God is saying when you actually listen. Prudent words keep your tank full.

The third mountain The cross is on the third mountain (remember the mountain of temptation and mountain of transfiguration). For the writers of the gospels, the cross is the coronation event. The true king took his throne on Mt. Golgotha. It bears repeating from last year: the journey from Lent to Easter is a journey of two mountains and a valley. Transfiguration starts us on one mountain. The long Lenten journey is the valley. Betrayal take us to another mountain and the cross.

Team mirror May you treasure the light of the Transfiguration, knowing that God wants to touch you. God will touch when you fall apart and when you are all together. God touches you when you speak and when you are quiet. We have a treasure to hold like the three disciples did. May you carry forward this gift and share light with others. Regardless if you are on the mountain of joy or a mount of suffering, God has chosen you, called you, and loved you at the right time to be a blessing to others.

Be the silly the world needs. A big part of my sermon focuses on absurdity. This has implications for how to engage the world. Two things I think are absurd (in a bad way) are racism & gun violence and maybe a little silly would go a long way.

Race is a construct. Ancestry is not. Ta-Nehisi Coates says it far better than me:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/05/what-we-mean-when-we-say-race-is-a-social-construct/275872/>. More generally, here is an article about how race (not ancestry) is arbitrary

<https://www.vox.com/2014/10/10/6943461/race-social-construct-origins-census>. Do your work and maybe occasionally laugh in the face of bigotry and separation, evil hates humor.

Gun violence. A priest in Oregon melted an AR-15 into gardening tools:

<https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/oregon-pastor-destroys-ar-15-won-affle-repurpose-parts-article-1.2907070>. It's a wonderfully absurd response to a chillingly ridiculous world of gun violence.

Todd