

“Veiled Glory”
A Sermon by Rev. Victoria ByRoade
Transfiguration Sunday
February 14, 2010
Scripture: Luke 9:28-36

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION: *Gracious God, we are grateful for your presence with all of us who have been driven to moments of silence. We thank you for the times, too, when we have been unable to be quiet. Teach us, encourage us and enable us to be and do what you desire. Amen.*

I read a story recently about a man who took his new hunting dog on a trial hunt one day. After a while, he managed to shoot a duck and it fell in the lake. The dog walked over the water, picked up the duck, and brought it back to his master.

The man was stunned. He didn't know what to think. He shot another duck and again, it fell into the lake and again the dog walked over the water and brought it back to his master.

Hardly daring to believe his eyes, and not wanting to be thought a total fool, he told no one about it. The next day, however, he invited his neighbor to come hunting with him. As on the previous day, he shot a duck and it fell into the lake. The dog walked over the water and got it. His neighbor didn't say a word. Several more ducks got shot that day – and each time the dog walked over the water to retrieve them – and each time the neighbor said nothing and neither did the owner of the dog.

Finally – unable to contain himself any longer – the owner asked his neighbor, “Do you notice anything strange about my dog?”

“Yes,” replied the neighbor, after thinking for a few minutes. “Your dog doesn't seem to know how to swim.”

The story of the transfiguration of Jesus is a difficult one to talk about. It is one of the stories in the Bible which is hard for us to

understand. It is one of those stories which just don't make sense to us – just as the story we just heard didn't make any sense to either the owner or the neighbor.

So, what do you think happened on the mountain that day?

Let's look at it for a minute, shall we?

Jesus went away to pray – as he so often did – and he invited Peter, James and John to come with him. So the four of them went to the top of a mountain, away from the crowds, and there Jesus began to pray. We do not really know what he prayed about, but we can guess from the rest of the story, that it must have been about the decision he knew he would have to make very soon – the decision to go to Jerusalem and face his death.

Just a few days earlier, Jesus had told his disciples that he would suffer many things, and that he would be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the teachers of the law – that he would be killed, and then on the third day he would be raised again to life.

While we don't know what Jesus was praying about, surely he would have prayed about these things and about what it would mean for him and for his friends.

And then, his face began to shine, and all around him was a bright light, and in the midst of that light, two men – Moses and Elijah appear and they speak to Jesus.

We are told that they spoke to Jesus about all that was to happen to him in Jerusalem, and that Peter and James and John, who, as usual, were nodding off, wake up enough to see this happening – to see Jesus in this glorious moment.

Some time after the disciples are fully awake, Moses and Elijah leave. And as they go, the disciples try to prolong the special moment they have witnessed. Peter – bless his heart – suggests that they might build some shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

You know, though, I think Peter suggests this, not just for the sakes of the disciples, as it is often suggested, but for the sake of the “real” Jesus whom they have come to know – a Jesus who – like the rest of us – must often have felt the need for rest and encouragement and support.

It was not to be, however, for, as with all special moments, as with all the visions of prayer and the gifts of exceptional grace which God bestows upon us, the moment passes and the next moment of life arrives. That being the case, what happens next to Jesus and the disciples who were with him, is familiar to us. No sooner than Moses and Elijah depart and the light of glory begins to fade, a cloud swoops over the place of transfiguration, bringing with it the ordinary world we all now so well – the world of doubt and fear.

All that is left to the disciples of the moment of glory they have experienced is a memory and a voice which speaks to them somehow from the cloud which surrounds them – the voice which says, “This is my son whom I have chosen – listen to him”. It doesn't seem like much, somehow, but it is. In fact, it is a great deal when we treasure it as it is meant to be treasured.

One of the most meaningful gifts of being a pastor is being privileged to talk with people who know that the end of their life is near. Just as Jesus experienced that day on the mountain top, often people – in the midst of their prayers and their sufferings – have a moment which convinces them that everything will be as it should. Somehow, in the midst of their preparation to leave this world, they experience a sense of peace which allows them to say to me and to their families that everything would, indeed, work out as it is supposed to work out – as Jesus said it would work out.

It is a passing moment, but it leaves its impact on the person who experiences it, it gives

them confidence to face what is coming, and the ability to tell others that all is as it should be – that light has come into the darkness and that while the darkness is very real, in the end, it will be overcome. We might call events like this a glimpse of glory, veiled though it may be, a moment in which the world, like Jesus' world on the mount that day, is transfigured.

For the disciples who experienced this moment given to Jesus, there was also a message – the message was that they should listen to Jesus because He is the chosen Son of God.

I believe that the transfiguration of Jesus was a moment which God gave to him to strengthen him for his own death. But this, my friends, is not the only kind of glory we are able to glimpse in this life – it is not just at the time leading to our death or the death of someone we care about that we get to experience something special from God.

God gives to us, on occasion other “glimpses of glory”

- Think of Moses whose face shone with a special light whenever he entered the tabernacle to listen to God
- Think of Elijah who discovered God was still with him, in the still small voice
- Think of Paul who heard Jesus speaking to him as he traveled the road to Damascus
- Think of yourself or people you know who have insisted that they are sure that Jesus or God or an angel has visited them in their sleep and comforted them or told them what they should do.

And, my friends, while these moments are special, they are not uncommon.

While I think I have shared this with some of you, I know there are many of you who are not aware of my experience. As I have told

you before, I did not grow up in a particularly church-ed family. Occasionally we would be dropped off at Sunday School at the Presbyterian Church – because that was the closest to us – but for the most part church did not play an important part in our lives. My brother and sisters and I said prayers – you know – “Now I lay me down to sleep”, and we knew the Golden Rule, but that was about the extent of our religious education.

So when I was a young teenager and was separated from my family for a few months and I experienced God's presence with me, it could not have been my imagination. You see, I had cried myself to sleep for several nights and then one night, after I had gone to sleep, I felt – more than heard – God say to me, “You are my child. I will not forget you. I have carved you in the palm of my hand. I had never heard those words. I had never expected to be aware of the presence of God. And yet, I had no doubt then, and have no doubt now, that that was precisely what I had experienced.

Certainly, the story of the transfiguration of Jesus is hard to talk about. There is a mystery about it – a mystery because it is a touch of the divine and we live in a very human world. But...I call you today to look for the divine in your life, to recognize the times you, like the disciples, have overseen or overheard someone's time of transfiguration, and the times that you yourself have in fact had a dream, or a vision, or an intuition, that has helped you, like it helped Jesus, stay the course and go forward to do what it is that God has called you to do in your life.

May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

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