

Sermon 3 March 2019  
Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-43

Epiphany began with stories of light. The wise men traveled from the East; they followed the light of a star. Jesus came as light to the Gentiles; he came to lead all creation into intimate communion with God. The word epiphany means revelation; it is the revealing of truth—and truth is revealed in the light.

The dictionary elaborates: epiphany is *usually a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something*. The biblical stories we tell during Epiphany reveal the *essential nature and meaning* of the truth of the presence of God in Jesus; he is God with us, God for us, and God in and for all creation—in him we live and move and have our being—whether we realize it or not. He is the air we breathe; he is the metronome of our beating hearts.

The weeks of Epiphany begin with stories about the light *out there*—the light of the star, the light of Jesus' baptism, the light of understanding the message. We travel from the light out there to the light *in here*—the light in our hearts, the light hidden in the essence of who we are. It was the light of the star “out there” *and* the light of their inner yearning for God that led the Magi to Bethlehem. The weeks of the Church's Epiphany are a journey of revelation in the light to the light. It is no surprise that the last Sunday before we begin Lent we tell stories of radiance. It is Transfiguration Sunday and the evidence and source of every transfiguration is light.

\* \* \*

Moses came down the mountain with the stone tablets. He *did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God*. Moses spent time *in* the light of God's presence and the light radiated in his own face.

\* \* \*

Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth. He reminds them of the day Moses came down from the mountain. He tells them they too will radiate the light of God's truth—they will know the presence of God and

in God's presence they will change, they will be transformed, they will be transfigured; their faces will shine with a divine light. Paul does not equivocate. Some might think he goes over the top when he declares, "*We are being transformed . . . from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* (2 Corinthians 3:18) He tells his sisters and brothers to go public with their passions, to let the light of their passionate faith, "the public announcement of the truth", shine for all to see. Stay with me now.

\* \* \*

Jesus and three of his closest disciples and friends go up the mountain to pray. Luke tells us that as Jesus was praying *the appearance of his face changed*. Peter, James and John see apparitions of Moses and Elijah, and they see the light of God's presence shine in Jesus' face.

Moses and Elijah are there, in part, for the disciples to understand that Jesus does not disdain or negate the past. He brings a new covenant, but his coming is a consequence, a continuation of what has gone before. Jesus is a Jew and he honors the truth of his heritage. Even as he transcends the past, he includes the past.

That is important for us to know. When we come to Christ and begin to follow Jesus our past is not erased, it is not denigrated. All that we have been and all that we have done, the good and the bad, is transformed; it becomes part of who we are as we move on in our journey of faith. We are forgiven, we are washed clean, we are born again—but the learning of our past stays with us. Even what we learned in our sins is transformed into wisdom and grace.

Like Jesus, we are transfigured in the presence of God. In our new lives we transcend and include all that we have experienced, all we have learned, all we have been. All that we are becomes alive—and the more alive we are in every moment, the more we radiate the light of the love of God.

The disciples' time on the mountain had to be spiritually intoxicating. They wanted to hold on to it, to build a permanent place in the light of Jesus's transfiguration, but Jesus made it clear they had to

leave that place of prayer and presence and go back down the mountain—there was work to be done.

They come down the mountain and Jesus continues his work of deliverance. Jesus heals a child in the grip of an evil spirit. The healing of that boy is an icon of the need for healing in our time. Jesus says, “You faithless and crooked generation, how long will I be with you and put up with you?” In every faithless and crooked generation, it is always the children who bear the brunt of neglect and cruelty—the children suffer at the hands of the demons we feed with our greed and with our indifference. We all have work to do.

We need to go up the mountain—we need to know God, we need the strength of God’s Spirit, *and* we need to come back down the mountain into the world of need. God is with us in our quiet morning prayers and God is with us as we go into the world. Paul knew the crucial truth: *It is Christ in me, the hope of glory*—the hope of radiant light.

\* \* \*

I realize this sermon has rambled some, and maybe been a little vague or even esoteric. Let me try to focus and clarify our Transfiguration message. My thoughts are about the light we see and the light we show; they are also about what we do since we are a people of the light.

What are we to do? Of course, the events of life call for us to do whatever we can to change things that are wrong, to make things better. We are called to help make the world more just, compassionate, kind, and whole. That is one way to respond to the admonition to “do something!” These are the actions of our common humanity. We don’t need special insight or wisdom to do something about the bad things we see. We need to do something.

There is another way to respond to the need to do something. Please lean forward with me to hear this. I pray the Holy Spirit give us light to understand and enough understanding to *believe* what I am about to say.

As I said a moment ago, our ability to do things to resist evil and do good is part of our shared humanity. We can all act for the common good, we can step forward and act for the needs of one person or the needs of many. We are all able to stand for the truth, to work for justice, to be compassionate.

There is, though, another way to do something good. That way is to act from the core of our identity; we do remarkable things when we live from the epicenter of our essence. There is something special in each one of us; each of us is a unique assembly of atoms and spirit—a truly one-of-a-kind soul that makes us who we are. So, what to do?

In a profound sense you are meant to do your “thing”—to realize and grow the seeds of your unique identity. The Quakers always talk about the inner light—the divine light each of us has in our heart. They are our deepest desires—and when we get in touch with them, we begin to shine with a holy light. It is the light of God in you.

I remember standing in the dawn light in the rolling hills of Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. In front of me several hundred soon-to-be Marines stood in formation. They had just finished the last test in the 54-hour crucible that culminates their 13-week boot camp. The 54 hours include sleep and food deprivation, grueling physical and mental challenges, and over 45 miles of driven marching. They are exhausted, but as they stand at attention, they know they have made it. They have discovered things about themselves, reached goals they never believed possible—they are Marines.

One of the chaplains I worked with in California stepped forward to pray. Before he prayed he paused. After the silence he said to them, *“Hold on to this moment. It is one of the defining moments of your life. From this day forward you are different. Hold on to this moment, feel the full measure of its impact on you. Hold onto it, and remember what you are feeling right now. Keep it with you for the rest of your life.”* He paused again before he said, *“Let us pray.”*

It was a moving moment and as I looked over the dirty, worn out face of the young men, I saw an undeniable radiance. They were in touch with something that transfigured them.

\* \* \*

You have felt the glow of that light when you have discovered something in yourself. You feel it when you are honed in on something you love to do. There is a glow to your face when you are in that place where you are truly *you*. Virtually no good thing is outside the scope of the inner light of your authentic self. In the moments when we are at home with ourselves—when we are who we truly are—we emit rays of light in the world.

When we are in harmony with God, when we are living out of our passion, we are in the flow of divine truth and goodness, and we shine with an alluring light; it is a seductive light of enthusiasm and authenticity. We are where we are supposed to be; we are where God wants us to be.

Hopefully, you have felt the glow of that light. Surely you have seen it in others. Have you ever met someone who was so into what they were doing, so enveloped in the moment that they fairly glowed with it? They were alight—and sometimes on fire.

\* \* \*

The Bible says that the world is standing on tiptoe to see the revealing of the children of God. (Romans 8:19) In Paul's words to the Corinthians this morning, the light of our revealing allows us to "recognize the face of the Messiah, and make visible what was hidden, make touchable what was unreachable." Out of the intimate brilliance of our mountaintop prayer and meeting with God, the light of our revealing lets us discern the work of God *in* us.

Henri Nouwen says that when we walk in the light of the Lord, we are able to "lead others out of confusion to clarification;" the light of our revealing stirs up the gift of compassion in us—and allows us to "guide [others] out of the closed circuits of their in-groups to the wide world of humanity;" and "through [our] critical contemplation [we] can convert [other's] convulsive destructiveness into creative work for the new world to come."

That is what we can *do* with our lives in the world. We can be who we are. With Jesus we can follow our bliss and find our passion—and shine our light into the dark corners of the world.

Jesus was alive as who he was in his moment in history. Can the same be said of us? The light in Christ is the same light in us—refracted through every part of our lives when we are who we are in our moment of time.