



Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Lockett Currie

“LISTEN TO HIM”: FROM TRANSFIGURATION TO TRANSFORMATION

Sermon for March 6, 2011

Scripture: Exodus 24:12-18 and Matthew 17:1-9

Today we celebrate Transfiguration Sunday, a bridge between Epiphany, the season of the year that we have been in, and Lent, which begins next week on Ash Wednesday. The word transfiguration means change or metamorphosis, most commonly remembered in terms of the ugly caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. And in case you have forgotten what epiphany means it is a sudden realization, often thought of as an intuitive leap of understanding, also a manifestation of the divine. If you have been listening carefully to the sermons and scriptures lately, you will be aware that this season of Epiphany is a season about light and revelation. It starts with the celebration of the bright light, the star of the East guiding the Magi with their gifts to Jesus. It also sometimes coincides with or comes just before the baptism of Jesus. Both at the baptism and at the Transfiguration a voice of God announces that Jesus is his beloved son. The scripture describing the Transfiguration follows with the words, “Listen to him.” The stories in both the Old and New Testaments today are stories of visions, times when ordinary people saw extraordinary things as they carried on their God journey. Right now I want to warn you that this is one of those participatory sermons. There will be a time when I will stop and ask if any of you would be willing to describe an extraordinary experience you have had on your spiritual journey.



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Let's first take a look at the Exodus reading. The ancient Near Eastern audience is use to mountains being the site of divine revelation. In today's reading the Mountain is Mt. Sinai, the very foundation of the people of Israel and the dwelling of their God. In v. 16 the text says, "Then the glory of the Lord dwelled on Mount Sinai." Later in chapter 29 is "I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them..." (29:45). Moses was bold enough to go up the mountain and through the cloud and the devouring fire on top of the mountain to be with God. We are told later that when he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of commandments, his face was shining so brightly that people were afraid to look at him. So you can see how this Exodus reference is related to the Transfiguration in terms of what can happen when God appears.

Jesus invited Peter, James and John to go with him up on a mountain. What happened on that mountain and what did it mean? We are told in Matthew that Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Did this really happen? What was it? Some call this a theophany, which means when the Divine comes to earth, usually invisible but is recognized by the effects in nature. According to my Google search a vision is like an epiphany except that it takes place in heavenly realm not on earth for all to see. I'd call the Transfiguration an Epiphany, which is when a divine being appears to certain human beings on earth. This epiphany has both visual and audio components. Peter was interrupted right in the middle of a sentence by God's voice, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him."



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For me the most important part is the voice of God telling them to “Listen to him.” How do we listen to Jesus? How do we hear him? How have you heard him? Before I go to the congregation for some of your answers, let me share some of my thoughts and experiences. I do believe that Jesus speaks through the Bible, especially in the Gospels. I don’t believe he said every word but that the general teachings written there as his words are something for us to listen to.

I believe we can see Jesus, especially the divine Christ part in other people. It doesn’t need to be a saint or famous preacher. I believe that an ordinary friend is often used to speak or act Christ’s message to us. There are other times when we can have our own epiphany. Many of you have heard the story of my having a long dark night of the soul and finally deciding to try to meditate again, to pray silently. I decided I would at least try 5 minutes of silently opening myself to God. During that time I physically felt God holding me and assuring me that I had a purpose. When I opened my eyes, it was 40 minutes later and tears were coming down my cheeks. It was soon after that I decided to go to seminary to become a minister. What about you in the congregation? Was there ever a time that you felt God or Jesus revealing themselves to you through one of your senses, seeing, hearing, touching? Any of you willing to share? **Sharing time**

Some folks have these experiences and never share it—for different reasons. Some are concerned that others will think they are crazy, hallucinating, or becoming a religious nut.

Mountain-top experiences can transform us. Just like Jesus and the disciples, we have to come down off the mountain. What then? Sometimes it



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takes a while to refocus our vision. Amy Frykholm says that “learning to see in new ways is one of the most difficult tasks of the transformed life. Old habits of selective vision, old choices about what to leave out and what to focus on tend to dominate us, even as we search for new ways of living that are in closer communion with the life of the Spirit”. In Annie Dillard’s essay “Seeing,” she recounts the experience of people who had been blind at birth, but had received sight thanks to a restorative surgery. To begin to see the world, the newly sighted had to reconcile preconceived notions of the world with objects, colors and distances. So will we need some time and maybe some help to go deeper and learn to see things in a different way. In both physical and spiritual sight folks may have to struggle to perceive precisely how to use it. As we become transformed by our faith experiences and insights we might need to learn to see ordinary things in extraordinary ways. After these mountain top experiences, we go back down the mountain, thankful for what has happened and realizing that we need to listen to Jesus. My guess is that if we really listen to him, we will turn our corner of the world upside down.

But first in this Lenten season, let’s take some time to rediscover our spirituality, just to be still and know that God is God. We are all God’s Beloved children. If we don’t get the “being” part, then the doing part will be chaotic and frustrating. We all need some quiet time to behold the mystery, to enter a place of awe. You have heard the expression “Don’t just sit there, Do something.” I say to you instead, don’t just *do* something! *Sit* there! Take time to notice and reflect on the Holy in your midst. Be a “human being” and not a “human doing”. As we go deeper into our faith, I believe not only we as individuals, but we as Deering Community Church and our surrounding



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communities can be transformed. In the deepening let us consider what Jesus means to us and what God is calling us to do. I wish you all a most holy and faith-filled Lenten Journey.