

We are about half-way from Christmas to Easter, and we have another red-letter Sunday, a big Sunday ... no not because it's Super Bowl, but this is Transfiguration Sunday in Jesus' journey of life... a time just before he starts his more perilous journey toward Holy Week, his passion, his suffering, and then Easter victory.

Transfiguration Sunday is a celebration of Light, of the Radiance of Christ on that mountain top, talking with Moses and Elijah.

There is no question that this story is one of the Bible's key examples of miracles, mysteries, or "theophanies"! No one can explain it scientifically; Nor can we dismiss it as something Peter, James and John made up! (Why tell "tall tales" just to be persecuted or killed?) There was an amazing incredible theophany, like when Moses was next to a burning bush that was not consumed, and he heard God say, "Take off your shoes, you are standing on Holy Ground" or like when Elijah was said to have been lifted up to the heavens by a whirlwind and "chariots of fire!" The miracle and mystery of Jesus on the mountaintop is very similar to the story of Moses coming down a mountain with the 10 commandments, with his face shining so much that he veiled his face to protect the people, who could not look upon the full glory of God. Yes, Moses, Elijah the prophet, and Jesus, all good company, all full of the Spirit of God, all radiant with Divine light.

One of the most obvious lessons from this story is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law (represented by Moses) and the fulfillment of prophets (represented by Elijah). Can you imagine the conversation they just have been having? Moses may have said to Jesus: I did my best passing on God's laws, refining them, but the people ignored them and did things like making and worshipping a huge golden calf. Jesus, I hope you can work on their hearts, and write laws on their hearts, so that love of neighbor comes naturally!

Imagine what Elijah might have been talking about with Jesus. He may have said to Jesus: I brought down actual fire from the sky

when needed (like that contest with worshippers of Baal), and kings were afraid of me, but I also went into hiding for a few years; the persecution of a prophet can be harsh, and hiding in that cave, I did hear a “still small voice...” so I’m sure the Lord God can speak in other ways than fires and earthquakes! I hope you can baptize people with “fire” *in their hearts*, with passion to change the ways of kings who are tyrants that want nothing but domination. I hope you can keep promoting the laws of love and justice without having to resort to threats of God’s punishments. Like me, Jesus, I’m sure you have special power to raise people from the dead, but if you don’t want to go into hiding for years, or be killed soon, you’ll better not broadcast your power everywhere too fast!

Yes, Jesus fulfilled the way of Moses’ good laws, and he fulfilled the revolutionary way of the prophets. Jesus was pure light, truth and love, so we can enjoy worship, “standing in his Presence, on Holy Ground.” *Yet there is the “already, not yet” aspect of faith*; the Messiah has *already* come in Jesus, but it is clear that the realization of his way and vision is *not yet* fulfilled in this world. He told his followers that they could do greater things, and said to them YOU are the light of the world. Other biblical characters are said to have had great light and power... We spoke of Moses and the prophets. Also, Joseph was full of wisdom, dream interpretation, and charisma that promoted him to be ruler over Egypt. Peter was full of power. Paul was enveloped in a brilliant light. It was said that Stephen, who was stoned as the the first Christian martyr, had a face that shone like an angel! He was testifying about Christ just before he was stoned, and the book of Acts says that he “looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

So the Transfiguration story reminds us that Jesus is the supreme, divine biblical figure, surpassing even the light of Moses and light of the prophets. But it also tells us that he is not the only one who imparts God’s Light to the world. We all can catch “glimpses

of divine light” and can also impart some of that light to others, because Divine light comes in many forms... such as understanding love, as truth that is spoken, as the Way of the Cross, (effort and sacrifice), as light that exposes lies and darkness.

Divine light can be thought of as LOVE, yes, even a “universal” Love, that helps people to smile! I often say, that while Christ is the head of our church, we can see Christ and his way in many people who may not profess Christ clearly or often! All we have to do is listen to a few good eulogies, and we can hear words of “universal” Light and Love! Not many of you were here for Donny Jay’s memorial, but the chapel was full! He used to sit in the back occasionally, and was not very vocal about his faith... yet from all the stories about him, we heard a “Christlike Life,” so much service and giving and goodwill, not to mention humor (it had been awhile since I had heard so much laughter mixed with tears at a funeral).

And I want to lift up the life of a friend of mine that passed on just this past week. Jim Ryan, did painting work here at the church: the parlor for example.. and also the front entryway and inside rooms of the parsonage. As I got to chat with him over the years, I discovered that as a young man he was a singer in a rock and roll band, he ran the “Hoo Doo BBQ” restaurant in Kenmore Square, welcomed all kinds of musicians there (it was next to the Rathskeller), and also fed various homeless folks there. He had a very quick wit, and a very big heart. He sent out Christmas letters full of crazy puns and jokes that helped lighten up the season. (I say often that Humor is surely one form of Grace; we all need to lighten up more often!). In his last years of life he was like the “mayor” of the James Steam Mill they say, actually the volunteer handyman of the place! He always had a “to do” list from his elderly neighbors. As an amazing eulogy, Let me read one entry on Facebook from an old-time musician friend...

“James would feed us when we didn’t have dough (James fed a lot of people who didn’t have dough!) We were accepted and welcomed into a freewheeling and open community; there was a lot of laughing and a great jukebox. James’ big gift to us was that the man knew how to Create Conditions. He created conditions in which we could figure out who we were, and maybe know how to be our best selves. He used humor, music food, and a very generous spirit to create conditions in which people could learn from each other and learn to love each other. James took his particular gifts and used them to bring people together, not on his terms, but on terms that community cooked up collaboratively. James created conditions in which people cared enough for each other that even in the scary times there was support and safety. People that had always been on the outside, looking in could feel a part of something. Beautiful lives were lost along the way yes and many more or saved mine among them. I know that his spirit lives on when any of us open the door a little wider so a few more can come in, or pushes the chairs back so someone else can sit at the table, or sees someone hungry and feeds them.

Sounds like a job description for a church minister; Sounds like the kind of inclusive love that Jesus showed; Sounds like the vision we do our best to live here at Belleville. The transfiguration event ends with the disciples and Jesus coming “down” from the mountaintop experience, just like Moses came down from his shining time with god. We need to worship and praise, get a little lost in light and love. But then we always need to “come down” to the “dark” places of this world and just do our best to shed some light on our situation, to bring a few rays of hope, and even laughter. Let’s take faith and confidence that there is always some new light to break forth in our midst! And let’s be vessels of that light whenever we can! Amen.