Light Changes Everything

Sermon by the Rev. Bernadette Hartsough

March 2, 2025-Transfiguration

Today is the last Sunday after the Epiphany. It is also called Transfiguration Sunday. I specifically asked Cathy not to list it that way on the bulletin. The feast of the transfiguration has its own day, August 6th. Yet today we read the transfiguration readings. We read these readings because on Wednesday we start Lent. We read these today because the transfiguration reveals Jesus’s glory to his disciples and highlights his divine nature.

In the Old Testament passage and the gospel passage, the faces of Moses and Jesus glowed. The glow, the light makes us take notice. Moses face shone. Jesus’s face shone. Why their faces? Faces are uniquely ours. Even identical twins have some differences in their faces. We read others’ emotions by their faces. That’s why when we speak to others or listen, we want to see their face. Right now, you want to see my face. You need to see my face to understand exactly what my words mean. Our faces can show great joy, sadness, worry. Faces also show empathy, compassion, love. If we want to see if someone has changed, we look to their faces. We can feel through faces. We view health and age through faces. We know others through faces. We remember faces long after people die. On our human bodies, faces identify us. When someone dies, we want to see their face to say goodbye. Faces are the windows to our very being. We read people by their faces. We communicate by our faces more than any other part of our body. We know people by their faces.

The glowing faces represent an encounter with God. Moses had a face-to-face encounter with God. Then we wore a veil because the light, the divinity shown in his face was too much for the people. Paul’s reading today in Second Corinthians is not kind to the Jewish people. Paul insults the Jewish people by saying that they were hardheaded. Paul says that God’s glory was veiled from them because they don’t believe in jesus. Paul says that *we* see the glory of God because we see and believe in Jesus as God made man-the messiah. We have unveiled faces seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. Too bad that Paul had to make this comparison by insulting the Jewish people. Paul being a former pharisee, had a complicated relationship with Judaism.

Jesus's transfiguration and Moses’s glowing face are not about the veil. They are *not* about the hiddenness of God and Jesus’s divinity. They are about the glowing-the light. Light changes what we see. Light highlights and brings things out in the open, those things that are hidden. Paul reminds us that when we encounter God we are slowly transformed into the image of God. Paul says, “The Spirit of the Lord gives us freedom. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God’s word; but by the open statement of the truth, we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God”. Life lived with God is not supposed to be a static journey. We are supposed to transform and grow to be more like Jesus. We are supposed to use the light to uncover, to see, and to bring the truth to others.

Using the light to uncover means we face difficult truths about ourselves and about society. It means we check ourselves. We monitor ourselves to constantly discover what we may have hidden or stored inside that needs to be uncovered and explored. We might have an old hurt that needs mending.

We use the light to see. When we interact with the cashier or the waiter or our Non-Food Pantry clients or one of our youths do we see them? When we see them then we start to know them, and we share some of our light with them.

When we uncover things about ourselves and bring ourselves to the light then our light can shine on others, with the light comes the truth.

I am always Leary when people try to hide information and the reasons behind things. When we avoid or hide things it usually means one of the following: that we are feeling guilty about something and do not want to face it, we are doing something for selfish reasons and don’t want to be criticized, or we are doing something that is morally and ethically wrong. When issues are brought out into the open, the truth comes out.

Today we start our Lenten study. The readings will prepare us to look deep into ourselves this Lent and to expect to be transfigured. Our study will bring part of our past into the light. It will uncover assumptions we may have had, and it may be uncomfortable. We may have to face some things hidden in ourselves. When we face ourselves, then God can work with us. That is part of our journey toward being transformed into God’s image and spreading light and truth. I hope that you will journey with me this Lent in spreading light and truth. Our world needs light and truth now more than ever.

Children’s sermon

In today’s Bible lesson, something happened that is called “transfiguration.” Transfiguration means a complete change of appearance to be more beautiful. We’re going to use this bag to help us learn about transfiguration. (Show kids the bag of oil.)

The Bible tells us that one day Jesus took three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, and went up on a mountain to pray.

As Jesus prayed, His face was changed and His clothes became a dazzling white. (Open the bag and pour the paint into it. Seal the bag tightly again.)

Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking to Jesus. Peter and the others had fallen asleep and when they woke up, they saw Jesus and the other two talking. (Mix the paint and oil.) They were amazed at that wonderful sight!

(Turn off the lights. And turn on the blacklight flashlight to show the paint in the bag.) What an experience! Do you know what caused the face of Jesus to be changed and His clothes to become dazzling white? It was because they were in the presence of God!

(Turn the lights on and the flashlight off.) The Apostle Paul said in a letter he wrote to the church at Corinth said that when we pray to Jesus then God gives us some of this light in our hearts. This light helps us to be like Jesus. When we help others and do the right thing then others see our light and we can share it.