

I'm Dreaming About...
Transfiguration Sunday
PPC
14 February 2021

2 Kings 2:1-12
Mark 9:2-9

Where do your dreams take you? Can you imagine a place where the sun shines so brightly that all around you the intensity of the colors is stunning? Have you known that place where the wind blows through you and transports you to an unknown landscape? Have you ever known the feeling of finding yourself, of knowing you're alive, in a moment of clarity?

In the intimate space of the Ste. Chappelle, the "Holy Chapel" in Paris, as Les Archêts de Paris caressed their strings, in the midst of the Pachelbel Canon, I found myself in that dreamlike trance. It had been a rainy and gloomy day outside. My leather sandals after treading in the muddy puddles of the Parisian streets were soggy and gushy on my feet. In spite of my umbrella, I was wet through. My companions fared no better. We felt and looked like drowned rats as we entered the chapel, waiting for the string quartet to regale us with their baroque music. It was very dark inside the chapel except for the lights that shone on the musicians. As the music began to reach its climax, suddenly a glorious light burst through the large stain-glass, rose window in the rear of the chapel. In that moment all of us there lived the same dream. The sun at last came out from behind the clouds even as dusk was descending and in a last minute burst of light filled the venue with color and light. The entire audience let out a gasp as for one, short, moment that felt like eternity, we were surrounded by light and music. We were on the mountaintop, filled with dazzling light and glorious music. There were

many different nationalities represented in that intimate gathering and yet for a brief, shining moment, we all understood the same language and saw the glory of God.

Mountaintop experiences are part of the life of faith. Although they may be few and far between, as faith seekers we know our moments will come. Like Icarus, though, human beings often learn the hard way that we aren't gods and can't live too close to the sun. For those times come, alas, when no matter how hard we resist it, we find ourselves slipping back into the valley. We live our lives mostly down here on the ground. Life on the ground, if we are aware and patient, will be interrupted by those moments on the mountaintop by remembering our dreams.

What really happened on that mountaintop when Jesus went to pray, inviting Peter, James, and John to accompany him? What really happened to Elijah, for that matter? Is there a message in these stories that leads us to the understanding of being transfigured?

Transfiguration means literally to change figure or form. Elijah ascends on a chariot of fire while Jesus appears in a cloth so white that nothing on earth could have bleached it that clean. He is sparkling. The disciples when they saw this, according to the text, were terrified. Some scholars say this is Mark's resurrection story because the risen Jesus does not appear after his death in Mark's Gospel. But here on the mountain, Jesus appears in a blazing light in a dream-like space - between Epiphany which began with the journey of the Magi and Lent which begins with the journey Jesus takes to the cross.

There's often a sense of disorientation that accompanies such a revelation. Where am I? Perhaps you've had that sense of waking suddenly from a dream where

you've been talking with a loved one who has died. Where am I? The day I spent in my sister's hospital room as she lay dying gave me this sense of un-reality. I wasn't sure where I was in time and space. All I could feel was that I was in a sacred space shared with my sister and as she drew her last breath there was a transfiguration.

Peter, James, and John have not a clue as to what to do or say. Peter, the usually loquacious Peter, is left speechless at first. His response to the dazzling light and vision, though, quickly turns into a plan. "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (9:4). He wants to hold onto the moment, make it live forever. He wants to stay on the mountaintop.

Before Peter can finish talking, a cloud overshadows the disciples. The whole scene reminds those three of the stories of their ancestors - the cloud resting on the mountain as a sign of YHWH God's presence in the wilderness. Then a voice comes from the cloud: "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him." As suddenly as the vision came upon them, it is gone and there is Jesus, standing as before, alone. Instead of sharing their excitement, though, Jesus tells the three to keep quiet about what has just happened. Before they can spread the story they need to understand it; they need to get the whole picture which includes suffering, death, and resurrection.

in Mark's story, the transfiguration scene follows the moment when Jesus first tells the disciples the prediction of his death and resurrection. We are given this glance backward and forward. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is linked to the law and the prophets. The way of Jesus begins to take the shape of the cross. Throughout Mark, the disciples seem never to understand this.

Perhaps we forget those last words that emerged from the cloud. “Listen to him.” We would much prefer to stay up on the mountain in the clouds and forget all that we need to do here on earth. This Transfiguration story teaches us that the way of God in Jesus is the way to the cross.

Can we think of this story as one that links the past to the present for us? On the night before he was killed, MLK, Jr., stood with Moses on the mountaintop. We remember that God allowed Moses to view the Promised Land from the top of Mt. Nebo but Moses never made it to the Promised Land. That stormy night in Memphis, Dr. King entered the clouds with Moses: “We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop...And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land...Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. (James Washington, Ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 286)¹

There are prophets of every age. As they say in the UCC, “God is still speaking.”

Five years before that night in Memphis, Dr. King shared a dream with thousands gathered on the mall in Washington, D.C. He tossed aside his printed text and spoke as though he saw the vision of things that no one else could see - a day when his children would live in a nation where they would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. Yet, today, the reaction to a Black man in the WH has been the election of a man who invokes violence so that white supremacy may live. Are we listening to the voice of the Beloved Son?

¹ Barbara K. Lundblad at: <http://odysseynetworks.org/news/onscripture-mark-9-2-9>.

There is an underlying mistrust and bias against those who don't look like the early colonists - people who are not white and Christian. We are witness today to an uptick in violent acts perpetrated against those who don't fit that stereotype. Many Asian Americans now fear for their safety because of the lies and innuendos that have been spread about the origins of the coronavirus, COVID-19.

This vision of Dr. King, I believe, is a direct connection between the dreams that Jesus had and the voice that we are charged to listen to. That vision comes and goes. Yet we must live for it. We must live into that vision so that racism which disfigures us all will be transfigured. We must live into that vision so that ALL people are treated fairly and with true justice. We must take up the mantle of love and justice. This is the hard work that must be done when we follow Jesus down from the mountaintop. Otherwise, he walks alone still.

Are we willing to be transformed? Can we take these moments of glory and be changed so that we want to follow Jesus? Much will be asked of us. Are we prepared to make the journey with Jesus to the cross that awaits on Calvary?

Having seen the word made flesh; having experienced the divine made human, now is the time of the unveiling. Here, for the moment, at least, we are allowed to see the glory of God. In this moment, may we, and the world, be transformed. For there is much work yet to do. We must face the realities of poverty, confront those who insist that trickle-down economics works, stand up to those who would lead us down the path of greed and self-centeredness. We must stand up to all the "isms" - racism, sexism, classism, nationalism - and with the memory of the mountaintop fresh in our souls, be emboldened to meet the challenges that we face here in the valley.

We have been to the mountaintop and we know what is possible.

May God bless us on this journey to Jerusalem as we pick up our crosses and follow our Saviour.

AMEN.