

Transfiguration Weekend (RCL/C): "Walking Around Shining Like the Sun"
Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-43a
February 26-27, 2022
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

"There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."¹

Thomas Merton, a 20th century Trappist monk, wrote that about being overwhelmed by love for strangers as he walked down a street in Louisville, KY. It was a mystical moment for him. He was a man of prayer, living in a monastery among other men of prayer, but this startling experience of love for others came out in the world as he shopped, not in the chapel as he worshiped. But I'm thinking the **seed** of the mystical moment was **planted** while he worshiped with his faith community and that it germinated during his personal prayer time. In the language of today's Gospel, the stage was set on the mountain top for what happened down on the plain.

If someone's pregnant, we might observe, "She's **glowing!**" If somebody's happy, we say, "He's **beaming!**" Well, in this story of the Transfiguration, as our Lord Jesus prays, His physical brightness is **dazzling**. He **radiates** not just holiness but divinity, God-ness. Peter, John and James are His closest followers, whom He's invited along for the hike up the mountain. If they'd had sunglasses, they definitely would have put them on. They're nearly blinded by Jesus' glory. And they're nearly blown away by the Big Voice from the cloud that overshadows them: *"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"* (Luke 9:35b)

They need to see all this, they need to hear all this, because of what they've recently learned about Jesus and because of what they've been told to expect for themselves.

"The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Jesus **is** the Messiah, the promised “Son of David,” but He’s not going to be a military leader or a king like David, his forebear. He’s going to be a “suffering servant” Messiah who will give His life for many. And those who would follow Him must:

“... deny themselves and take up their cross daily... For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” (Luke 9:22-24)

That wasn’t easy to hear about Jesus and certainly not anything the disciples wanted to hear about themselves. Maybe their Rabbi was off His rocker?? Then dazzling light and a divine Voice put their doubts to rest. They certainly knew the story of Moses’ face shining so brightly after His audience with God that his face had to be veiled. Jesus, too, has seen God face to face. However, unlike Moses, Jesus is the only Son of the Father. And whereas Moses was like the moon, reflecting light from another Source, Jesus is like the Sun, blazing with His own light. He **is** the Source.

Jesus says it outright in St. John’s Gospel: *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8:12). In St. Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says:

“You are the light of the world... [L]et your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”
(Matt. 5:14a, 16b-c)

Speaking of which, let’s check in on the disciples whom Jesus did **not** invite on the hike up the mountain. They’ve stayed back in town, and are trying to make good use of their time and do some good while they wait for the others to return. That’s not working out so well, though. One of their dissatisfied customers has a complaint and an urgent request for Jesus when He reappears:

... “Please, please, Teacher, take a look at my son. He’s my only child. Often a spirit seizes him. Suddenly he’s screaming, thrown into convulsions, his mouth foaming. And then it beats him black-and-blue before it leaves. I asked your disciples to deliver him but they couldn’t.” (Luke 9: 38-40, *The Message*)

Sometimes it's just not enough to sing "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." The disciples are still trainees and have come up short. Jesus gets "a little" grumpy with them, then He does something with all that blazing glory revealed up on the mountain: He heals the poor boy, the man's "only child." It's so interesting, that detail about the epileptic-sounding boy being an **only** child. Jesus is also His Father's **only** Son. The dead daughter of Jairus whom Jesus commands, "Little girl, get up!" and she does, is Jairus' **only** daughter (Luke 8:41b-42). The dead child of the widow of Nain whom Jesus raises up living from the funeral litter is her **only** son (Luke 7:12).... Jesus' compassion dazzles us.

"You are the light of the world... [L]et your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Those are the words of Jesus that our assisting minister quotes as she or he extends a lit baptismal candle to the newly baptized. It's a commissioning and every time it's spoken, it's a lifelong reminder to us that we are called to shine brightly with the light of Christ wherever we go, whatever we do, no matter how young or how old we are, no matter whether we're at work or at play, the student or the teacher, the doctor, nurse, therapist or the patient, the store clerk or the customer, the boss or the employee, the coach or the player, the pastor or the parishioner, the publisher or the writer:

"You are the light of the world... [L]et your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

We shine brightly when we love, when we serve, when we give of ourselves, when we share our blessings, when we choose to look at this world through the eyes of our Lord Jesus, seeing every other human being as a precious child of God, seeing the Creator in all of creation, both in its wonder and its woundedness, making ourselves available to become human channels of Heaven's healing grace. Jesus was transfigured in a moment. God-

willing God transforms us, over a lifetime, more and more into the likeness of His Son, His only Son, His Chosen.

Here's more of what Thomas Merton wrote about his mystical moment:

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness.... This sense of liberation from an illusory [imagined] difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud... I have the immense joy of being [human], a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. **“There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.** Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts... the person that each one is in God's eyes.²

Lent begins this coming Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. We're blessed with an entire season to refocus on what's essential to growing our faith life: dedicated, intentional time worshiping God within our community, praying in private, and serving our neighbor. Let's keep in mind: the stage is set on the mountaintop for what happens down on the plain.

Amen

¹Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, quoted in www.goodreads.com.

²Ibid.

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