

A Light so Bright  
Transfiguration 2010  
St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church Novato  
Written and Preached by the Rev. Susan D. Parsons February 14, 2010

Their faces were so changed so filled with light  
It was hard for people to look at them  
The readings tell us  
Moses and Jesus both climb  
To the top of a mountain today  
Where they meet God and  
Their encounters with God so  
Change them they shine  
Brighter than the sun

It is a big Sunday in the church year  
The last Sunday of Epiphany  
Lent begins on Wednesday and so  
We have the story of the transfiguration of Jesus  
But it is also a big day  
For some people because  
It is also Valentine's Day  
Throw in an exorcism and  
Moses and the Ten Commandments and  
We have a pretty dazzling mix of topics

This is Moses second trip up  
The mountain to meet with God  
The first time he went up there  
God gave him the Ten Commandments  
Written in stone but  
When Moses got back down the mountain with  
This rather important statement from God  
Moses is shocked to find his people worshipping a  
Golden calf they've forged out of their jewelry  
They are dancing and drinking and carrying on  
As if it's Valentine's Day  
Moses is furious and  
In a fit of anger  
He throws the original Ten Commandments to the ground  
Smashing it into little bits.

When we meet up with Moses this morning  
He has just climbed the mountain a second time and  
Has a replacement set of commandments  
Apparently God was not too peevish about  
What happened with the first set because  
Moses was so filled with the light of God  
People can't bear to look at him  
Unless he has something over his face

Centuries later when Jesus climbs his mountain  
He's goes there to encounter God too but  
Through prayer and meditation  
Not necessarily a face to face with God  
James and John and Peter  
Who are with Jesus and  
Witness the brilliant light and  
The spirits of Moses and Elijah  
They hear the discussion between  
Jesus and Moses and Elijah about  
Jesus' death in Jerusalem and  
Peter wants to hold on to the moment  
Wants to set up tents and stay there in  
This unbearably important transcendent moment

*Pause*

When Jesus and Moses are seen as  
Dazzling white  
When they are too brilliant to even look at  
They are being seen by the people who are with them as  
God sees them  
Without all their brokenness  
Without all the 'stuff'  
People pick up along the way that  
Covers up who we really are  
God sees us as we truly are  
As pure dazzling white light

Then at the end of this wonderful mountain top experience story  
We have this other story  
That seems so strangely out of place

It's about a boy who's possessed by a demon  
Whose father goes first to the disciples  
To have him healed  
Then when they fail to heal him  
The father goes to Jesus  
The story doesn't seem to have anything  
To do with transformation  
It seems tacked on and yet  
It has everything to do with it

Because after we've been up on the mountain and  
We've had our mountain top experience  
We have to come back down from the mountain and  
Get to work exorcising the demons  
Not only our own but  
Helping others  
Get rid of theirs  
We want to help others get rid of  
All the things that keep their light hidden away  
And in doing so  
We will find that we have healed ourselves of  
All the stuff that keeps our own light from  
Dazzling the crowds

Now I am using the word demon in the  
Broadest sense of the word  
But you get what I mean  
We all of us have some negative voices  
Some bad habits  
Some addiction that  
We need to exorcise from our lives or  
We know people who could use some help  
Or need us to listen or set a boundary or  
Just need us to be kind  
I don't mean big heroic work here  
Though it may sometimes be that  
There are everyday things  
People can do for one another that  
Would exorcise a demon from someone's life

Preachers get up and tell congregations they 'should'

Get out there and  
Heal or exorcise or pray or whatever and  
The reason we do this is  
Right here in this reading  
Because it will transform you  
It will transfigure you

When we get out there into the world and  
Try to make it a better place in  
Whatever way we can  
Even if it's being the nicest most honest  
IRS agent in the US  
We get to know other people  
We get to know ourselves  
Get to know our demons so to speak  
Get to know what needs to be healed in ourselves and  
If we can remember what it was like  
There on that mountain top  
Then maybe we can be strong enough to  
Heal the demons that are darkening our lives  
And darkening the lives of others  
We'll all begin to dazzle each other

*Pause*

I don't have a big momentous mountain top experience  
To tell you about like  
The moment I knew I was called to the priesthood or  
Something equally significant or powerful  
The important bits of knowledge  
The big awakenings  
The 'aha' experiences rarely come to me as flashy moments  
I've never had a big mountain top experience  
A transcendent moment  
The Holy Spirit moves through my life  
Sweetly and graciously and abundantly but  
In ways that are generally  
Unheralded and quiet  
So they slip past my busy consciousness and  
I'm aware of a visit from the Divine  
Only after the moment is long gone  
Lots of people tell me this is true for them too

There are lots of transfiguration stories in movies  
Think Babette's Feast or Monsieur Ibrahim or  
The more popular Lord of the Rings

But to make transfiguration truly more  
Everyday sort of event  
I'm going to make a giant leap here and  
Because it's Valentine's Day and  
Compare it to falling on love

Now falling in love is not transfiguration but  
Falling in love does have some of the same characteristics as  
A mountain top experience  
It's a moment when we are at our best  
We are full of love for the world  
We experience the world as a wonder filled place  
We are energized excited and  
The focus of our love is this perfect being and  
We are united as one  
Nothing stands between us  
Nothing can ever separate us and  
We cannot imagine life will ever be the same again and  
It won't  
We are changed by the experience  
We make a commitment to stay together forever  
Some of us get married

Then at some point  
18 months three years  
We find we have somehow got back down to the valley  
Some of us took the express elevator

This is when we have to get to work  
I will not mention demons here  
We'll talk instead of healing and nurturing and patience  
And everything else that goes into making a relationship work  
But most especially  
Remembering what it was like to  
Be in love  
To be crazy in love  
Helps on those days when

*Just a little cough from your dearly beloved ...*

*Pause*

It would be nice to  
Stay in the moment of glory  
To stay in the light  
To stay with God and the prophets and  
Just build a tent there and  
Stay in the bliss  
But there is a world out there who need us  
Sometimes the healing will be beyond our powers or  
We won't do our best and  
We'll get discouraged  
Just like the disciples in the Gospel today  
When they couldn't heal that poor child but  
It's all right because  
We have those mountain top experiences  
    Whether they had the luminescence of firefly or  
    The brilliance of the sun  
We have those to remind us of  
Who has sent us and  
Of the healing power that we have been given  
We have listened to God  
We are being transfigured into  
A light so bright it illumines the day

OLD TESTAMENT: Exodus 34: 29 - 35 (RCL)

Exod 34:29 (NRSV) Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; 34 but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

PSALM 99 (RCL)

Psal 99:1 (NRSV) The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble!  
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!  
2 The LORD is great in Zion;

he is exalted over all the peoples.  
 3 Let them praise your great and awesome name.  
 Holy is he!  
 4 Mighty King, lover of justice,  
 you have established equity;  
 you have executed justice  
 and righteousness in Jacob.  
 5 Extol the LORD our God;  
 worship at his footstool.  
 Holy is he!  
 6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests,  
 Samuel also was among those who called on his name.  
 They cried to the LORD, and he answered them.  
 7 He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;  
 they kept his decrees,  
 and the statutes that he gave them.  
 8 O LORD our God, you answered them;  
 you were a forgiving God to them,  
 but an avenger of their wrongdoings.  
 9 Extol the LORD our God,  
 and worship at his holy mountain;  
 for the LORD our God is holy.

NEW TESTAMENT: 2 Corinthians 3: 12 - 4:2 (RCL)

2Cor 3:12 (NRSV) Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. 14 But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. 15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; 16 but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. 4:1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 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.

GOSPEL: Luke 9: 28 - 36, (37 - 43a) (RCL)

Luke 9:26 (NRSV) Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. 27 But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." 28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Eli'jah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Eli'jah"--not knowing what he said. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen. 37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. 38 Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. 39 Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. 40 I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." 41 Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." 42 While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. 43 And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

