

“Shine, People Shine!”

C Last Sunday after Epiphany; Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

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Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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### The Transfiguration

<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup> They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake,<sup>[b]</sup> they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

<sup>33</sup> Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,<sup>[c]</sup> one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen;<sup>[d]</sup> listen to him!” <sup>36</sup> 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.

### Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon

<sup>37</sup> On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup> Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup> Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he<sup>[e]</sup> shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup> I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” <sup>41</sup> Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

### **I. SHINE ON, JESUS!**

They climb a “high mountain” that day. Jesus and three of his closest friends: Peter, James and John. Scripture doesn’t tell us what *led* to this event, really. It was just “eight days after” he had been teaching them what it really means to follow him –the suffering and celebration, all rolled into one. What they would experience on this Way of Life and faith.

“Eight days” is a sacred time. Not just a week plus one day, but a “Kairos moment” – a moment in *God’s* time. Eight days is that time apart, that doesn’t fit into our calendars – like the Resurrection. Or other mountaintop experiences. When times stands still.

And mountaintops are not mere *geographic* places to climb with a sturdy pair of hiking boots and a backpack. George Hermanson, describes it: Jesus selects Peter, James, and John to accompany him. He leads them up a high mountain. Although unnamed and unstated, a "high mountain" is a "**thin place**," a place that is close to the spiritual realm, a place for sacred encounters.

And, once there, these guys have anything *but* a typical "summit the 14-er experience" where they stop to catch their breath, have a sandwich and a cliff bar, snap a pic, and sign the book that says they made it. Things get shiny, and cloudy, and booming all at once! The disciples are not sure what's happening. Not sure what it all means—could that be Moses and Elijah there, talking to our friend, Jesus?! Could that be Jesus *glowing*?!

And then, what are those words booming out of the cloud?! "**This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!**" We have heard those words before! Oh, now I remember! When Jesus was baptized in the river by John. "My Son, the Beloved." I think God means business here!

We hear this story every year, and we marvel at Jesus getting all shiny and glowing. And the disciples getting so sleepy that they almost miss the whole momentous event! And then, dear Peter turns practical and tries to build cabins for everybody, or at least check Air BnB to see if he can play the good host.

And, I don't know about you, but I always feel a sense of "so what" with this Transfiguration story. It feels "off in the clouds," unconnected with us and our journey, like our down-to-earth Jesus has suddenly gone lofty in the clouds, turned shiny and rather other-worldly, and we aren't sure we can relate to him anymore.

Yes, he's affirmed by God and shown in all his glory, but what does that mean for *us*, his followers? What do we *do* with this story, other than to be sleepy, distant onlookers? Are we supposed to go in *search* of mountaintop experiences? Find those thin places, see if we can shine, *too*?

## **II. SHINE ON, PEOPLE!**

A little boy was out in his front yard, throwing a ball up in the air. An elderly passerby asked the boy what he was doing. He replied, "I am playing a game of **catch** with God. I throw the ball up in the air and he throws it back."

And that's exactly it! Transfiguration Sunday and this scripture mean nothing if we leave Jesus on the mountaintop alone. If we throw the ball (and our eyes and ears) up there, and watch as mere observers while Jesus shines, and experiences the Holy in his "thin place" and it stays there.

Jesus didn't stay there, after all! If we want to be involved in this journey, we are compelled to take this "shining on the mountaintop" and bring it down to the valley and shine there too! Like Jesus did.

We're all playing a game of catch with God! We toss up our prayers, our lives and our pleas for help. And God tosses the ball back—engages with us, but puts it back to us, too! “Here, you’ve got this. You take it from here. Take the ball, play the game, engage in life fully. Take the radiance from the mountaintop that is yours to shine. Shine out and shine on!

We’ve gotta shine!  
Shine light into darkness,  
Shine Love into pain,  
Shine compassion into prejudice.

### III. BUT, I DON'T FEEL LIKE SHINING!

That's the “so what.” But there's a “but” as well. But, “What if I don't feel like shining, with you, Jesus?”

What if your flame is burning low, struggling in this season to keep alight? What if you can't stand to hear one more time that you need to “let your light shine” because you just don't have any wick left?

What if life has dealt *too* many blows; circumstances, loss, illness, accidents have put your light smack dab under a **bushel** and it's not coming out anytime soon?!

For starters, then it's especially good that you are here today. Even in the midst of snow and cold and feeling “snowed-under”. Or, is it “snowed *over*?!” Then the Table is *especially* for you. Now, today, to come, and be nourished.

The other, most essential part of this scene to keep in mind—especially when you don't feel like shining, is that Jesus did *not do this on his own!* His radiance was not of his own making. No more than we let our light shine of our own power.

Nor does it mean we put on masks. Or fake it till we make it. But, that Christ shines *through* us and we get out of the way! We realize that we cannot do this on our own. Jesus wasn't shining all by himself—of his own volition. The Spirit that named and claimed him at Baptism was making its presence and claim known once again: “This is my Beloved Child! Listen to him.”

It was God's doing – all this radiance and shining. Working in and through Jesus to bring the light to the world.

Jesus learned a little more about himself in that moment; was reminded who and whose he was. We need to do the same, if we are to keep shining. Need to remember our Baptism, our identity, our name: “Beloved” –have those mountaintop experiences.

Barbara Brown Taylor describes it: “when light burst through all his seams and **showed him what he was made of.** It was something he never forgot.”

We begin the Lenten Journey this week. Are we going to “give up something, for Lent?” Or “take on something?” How about radiance? Not of our own making or carrying on, but Spirit working and shining

out of us, through us, as we take on and carry on the Light of Christ?

#### **IV. DON'T STAY ON THE MOUNTAINTOP**

And finally, one key “so what” remains. Jesus didn't stay on the mountaintop, basking in the glow; head in the clouds.

Henry Drummond, the Scottish theologian said, "God does not make the mountaintops for us to live on the mountaintops. It is not God's desire that we **live** on the mountaintops. We only ascend to the heights to catch a broader vision of the earthly surroundings below. But we don't live there. We don't tarry there. The streams begin in the uplands, but these streams descend quickly to **gladden** the valleys below."

Jesus goes down from that mountaintop experience to a very desperate family. You see, a man with an only son isn't just a concerned father that his boy has a demon.

*A man with an only son who was seized by a spirit is in danger of being ostracized by the entire community. ... Since his son could not marry, the father faced the end of the family line, the loss of its land, and hence its place in the village. All members of his extended family were thus imperiled. The cure of this boy is thus the restoration of the family as well. (Hermanson)*

Jesus does far more than a “simple healing in body” here. He shines light into a community—restoring the only son to the family, restoring the relationship of the family in the community—for the health of all together.

#### **V. CARRY THE LIGHT**

For us, this would be like a Monday morning. They always come, and we must choose how to respond. *After* the incredible mountaintop experience. *After* the

incredible weekend, or amazing vacation: it's what we do Monday morning that what really matters!

This last week we were given an opportunity. A classic Monday morning happened, and we were forced back into the trenches. Back to the valley below. No more lazing and glowing on the mountain, soaking in the rays, pretending there isn't a suffering world around us.

Many of our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ experienced their light being a little more extinguished this week. Or a lot more! Blown out; snuffed in their souls. Doctrine and dogma got in the way of doing what Jesus commanded us! Love your neighbors. ALL your neighbors.

LGBTQ faithful in the United Methodist Church, and all who love them and identify with them, are hurting this week, especially. But that is just one example. It happens every week, in some segment of the population. Lights are put under bushels – snuffed out by forces beyond our control.

We need to hold that candle right now even higher and shine ever brighter for those who keep getting their spirits squelched. Need to reach out boldly with our Christ-infused bright lights and offer comfort, reassurance and true open hearts, open minds, open doors to all who have been shut out.

We must remember, like Jesus, what we are made of. Our God-given identity – full of light and love and wholeness; and proclaim to the world that *every* soul

shares that same light and burns with the flame of the Divine shining out. When others' flames are weak or diminished, ours must shine brighter on their behalf. Not of our own doing, but Christ shining out *through* us.

## **VI. SONG OF INVITATION**

*"Will you Let Me Be Your Servant? #391, vs. 3*

I will hold the Christ-light for you  
In the night time of your fear.  
I will hold my hand out to you;  
Speak the peace you long to hear.

### **LOVE IN A LEPER COLONY—a story of shining bright**

**A fiftieth wedding anniversary** always deserves recognition, but this one was truly gold. When Damien and Maria made their wedding vows fifty years ago they were under no illusions. Banished to an isolated leper colony in backwoods Paraguay, they were surrounded by crippled and disfigured fellow sufferers of the then-incurable disease. They asked each other if they would still love even when their fingers curled and their skin dried and cracked.

Today they laugh as they recall the first time their glances met. The joy they exude is remarkable, considering all they have suffered. In earlier years when they were healthier, medicines to treat the disease were donated to be distributed free to the patients. However, the corrupt colony administration required the patients to pay. By the time Damien and Maria were able to afford the medication it was too late; the damage to their bodies had been done. Yet Damien and Maria are not bitter.

Seeing God in the nature surrounding them and in the stars, they say, has helped them find peace, hope, and the strength to forgive. And both express thankfulness for all the friends they have made over the years. "One who has friends is alive, but one with no friends is dead."

Damien is a gifted craftsman, despite his crippled hands and twisted fingers. After careful observation of the sun, he carved a sundial out of a stone in his garden that accurately reads the hour, day, and month of the year. But now his eyesight is failing.

On a last attempt at carving a wooden figure of Francis of Assisi, he accidentally cut off the saint's fingers. "St. Francis was known as the friend of lepers, it's appropriate he has no fingers," he jokes. Unable to carve, he now contents himself with carefully tending a garden on the patch of dirt in front of the tiny wooden hut they call home.

Maria is confined to a wheelchair with one leg amputated and is nearly deaf, but she shows no signs of self-pity. "She is the administrator of the house, and manages everything," says Damien proudly.

The love between them is visible and tender. Damien says they have made it this far only through dialogue, never letting a day end without resolving their differences. Their failing hearing creates new challenges, but they often understand the needs and thoughts of the other instinctively without even talking. "Every day we love each other more, and understand each other better."

The faithfulness of Damien and Maria despite all odds gives witness to a love that lasts; not a passing selfish infatuation but the love described in the well-known verse: "Love is

patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (1 Cor. 13: 4-7).

As well-wishers say their farewells, Damien jokes: “We’ll see you at our diamond wedding anniversary. I’ll be older then so I won’t eat as much.”