

A glimpse

Luke 9:28-36

February 10, 2013

Today is the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany, also called Transfiguration Sunday. Epiphany means appearance, manifestation, revelation, or sudden insight. Epiphany is a season of light. It's about seeing things in the light, seeing things we haven't seen before, or seeing things we have seen before from a wholly new perspective. It's about Jesus' epiphany, about Jesus being revealed to the world, and about Jesus revealing God to the world. But it's also about our epiphany, about seeing ourselves as we are by the light that comes from Jesus.

This is who we are ...

We are chosen people, people chosen by God for a task. We are God's messengers, God's servants.

But we are more too than messengers, more than servants. God calls us by name. God claims us as his own. We are God's dear children, members of God's family.

And we are called God's bride, together a people in whom God delights, partners with God in creating beauty out of the energy of our shared love.

We are God's people, created for community to make community, brought together to bring together. We are Jesus' people, brothers and sisters of Jesus, followers of Jesus, before everything else, above everything else.

This is who we are. By the light of Jesus, we see ourselves as we really are. That's what transfiguration is about. By the light of Jesus, we see ourselves as we really are.

Transfiguration Sunday ends the season of Epiphany because it completes the epiphany. It completes the revelation, the revealing of Jesus, the revealing by Jesus. Transfiguration means change of figuration, change of appearance. Briefly, for a short time, just enough time to see it, Jesus appearance changed: his face and his clothes became dazzlingly bright.

Peter and John and James got a glimpse. They didn't tell anybody anything about it at the time, but they remembered it. And because they remembered it, and because the gospel writers recorded their memories, we get a glimpse, too.

We get a glimpse. Of what?

Is it a glimpse of Jesus' divinity? Does transfiguration reveal that Jesus is God? As if all along Jesus has been living in disguise as a human being, but now the disguise falls away, and the real Jesus, the divine Jesus, is, for a moment, plain to see?

That makes for a good religious story, fitting well with other such good religious stories about heaven and angels and miracles and supernatural encounters. This may come as a surprise to you, but I have little use for nice religious stories. I get pretty impatient with religion and all the trappings that go with it. What do heaven and angels and miracles and a supernatural Jesus have to do with my life, here, as it is? What do these things have to do with this world, here, as it is? What's the point?

If transfiguration, the climax of epiphany, is about showing us that Jesus is really God, not a human being as we are, what's the point? So the disciples, so we, will take Jesus seriously? If we didn't already take Jesus seriously when he said: "If you want to come with me, you must deny yourself, take up your own cross every day, and follow me," will seeing his shining face make a difference? Besides, God takes care of the "taking Jesus seriously" issue a few moments later when he speaks from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen -- listen to him!" Then, what's the point?

There is no point. A divine Jesus shedding his human disguise is everything we are not, everything we can never be. We can't go where he goes. We can't be what he is. We cannot follow him. Or if we do, it means that our task too is to shed our humanity, to shake ourselves loose of this body that holds us back, to purge ourselves of the burden of this flesh. It means that this doesn't matter. It means that matter doesn't matter.

But, tell me, when Jesus was transfigured atop that hill, what happened? His face was shining! His flesh was shining! God is Spirit. God does not have form or shape or body or flesh or face. Jesus' flesh was transfigured.

And what were they talking about? What were Jesus and Moses and Elijah talking about? They were talking about the way Jesus was going to fulfill God's purpose by dying in Jerusalem. They were talking about Jesus dying. Tell me, can God die? This was no super secret meeting of supernatural beings talking about things no human ear can bear, deep things no human mind can fathom. They were talking about the very same things Jesus had just finished discussing with his disciples.

No, when Jesus is transfigured, when for a brief moment his appearance is changed, Peter, John, and James -- and we! -- get a glimpse of Jesus' humanity! For a brief moment, we see him, the human Jesus, not as in a mirror dimly, but face-to-face, as he really is. I don't think it was really Jesus' appearance that changed, but the disciples' ability to see. This is who he is!

And this is who we are, when we follow him, when we join ourselves to him. By the light of Jesus, we see ourselves as we really are. This is who we are! Men and women made in God's image! Men and women, created to mirror God's glory, in our flesh and blood, by what we do and by who we are, just as Jesus did.

But if this is who we are, if this is what Jesus reveals us to be, men and women made to share God's glory ...

What would that mean for what I think of myself, for how I take care of myself, for how I treat my self?

And what would that mean for what I think of you, for how I take care of you, for how I treat you?