

Meditation – “Light and Shadow”

Sunday, February 11, 2024

Scripture Readings – II Corinthians 4:3-6, Mark 9:2-9

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Our first scripture reading is II Corinthians 4:3-6. In the epistle reading assigned for this Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday, Paul writes of light and glory. Christ has shone “out of darkness” and “in our hearts.” Although some are blinded and do not see the glory of God in Christ’s face, those of us who proclaim Christ as our Savior see the light. This is the Word of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from clearly seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’s sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Amen.

On this Transfiguration Sunday we celebrate the radiant light of God revealed in the glory of Jesus Christ as he stood with Moses and Elijah on a mountaintop so long ago. In the Protestant tradition, Christ’s Transfiguration is commemorated the Sunday before Lent as a glimpse of the resurrection, empowering us for the journey of Lent and the road of sorrow Christ walked. Our second Scripture is Mark 9:2-9. Listen to the Word of God.

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And Jesus was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ Peter did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus asked them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Amen.

The title of the meditation “Light and Shadow”

The Text: Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Mark 9:7

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, as we reflect on Christ’s Transfiguration, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

Throughout recorded history, mountains have been places where people have felt closer to God: Abraham on Mount Moriah, Moses on Mount Sinai, Elijah on Mount Carmel, and Peter, James, and John with Jesus on the Mount of the Transfiguration. Mountaintop experiences are recorded by those who received renewal and insight that became courage for all humanity, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. confirmed in his final speech advocating for justice on behalf of sanitary workers in Memphis the night before he was assassinated: “I have been to the mountaintop.”

Amidst the challenges of ordinary life especially in the heart of the prairieland, a mountaintop journey provides a new perspective within the wonder, beauty, and mystery of God's creation. Peter, James, and John are given the privilege to witness the dazzling splendor, the Transfiguration, a sign of Christ's resurrection glory. Although unable to comprehend the meaning at the time, they are not left totally baffled. As they stood between the light and the shadow, the voice of God gives them, and each of us, insight, and direction to listen to Christ. We are not left to fumble through life merely doing the best we can, right or wrong! God's love is made flesh, God's light shines in the darkness, and God's will is articulated in the voice of Jesus Christ. As believers, we have been given the certitude of living by listening to Christ who inspires and enlightens us.

As we prepare for our journey into lent and revisit the places of vulnerability and suffering in Christ's life and as we embrace the vulnerability in each of our lives, we do so without apologize for the suffering that is a part of life. As Christ taught, there is no victory without sacrifice, there is no gain without loss, there is no glory without suffering, there is no joy without sorrow, and there is no light without shadow. These are integrally related, each a part of the whole, and each a part of the human experience.

The interconnectedness of light and shadow, joy and sorrow are explored in the writings of C.S. Lewis, a prolific English author and Anglican Lay theologian in the twentieth century best known for The Chronicles of Narnia which have enlightened children and adults alike in capturing the mystery of faith and the love of God.

Surprised by Joy is the title of C.S. Lewis' autobiography and conversion to Christianity, written in 1956. In this very personal book, C.S. Lewis shares how his early formative years shaped his faith and understanding of God. The joy he longed for as a child, he found unexpectedly amid the bittersweetness of life and in the arms of a God who embraced that life in Jesus Christ.

Although the book ends with Lewis' conversion to Christianity in 1931 at the age of 33, one wonders if the "joy" which surprised this distinguished author and Oxford scholar might also refer to Joy Davidson, the Jewish- American poet, converted Christian, and mother of two, with whom he began a correspondence in 1950. What began as an intellectual kinship grew into a trusted friendship. Following Joy's painful divorce in 1953, she returns to England with her sons. In 1956, when her visitor visa was not renewed, Lewis consented to a civil marriage as her trusted friend.

The couple lived separately until, in 1957, Joy was diagnosed with incurable cancer. When faced with the prospect of losing Joy, Lewis recognized what he had found in this intelligent, loving, progressive woman. The shadow of her unexpected suffering revealed the light of his surprising love. Although the Church of England would not recognize their marriage because of Joy's divorce and his Oxford colleagues did not approve, a friend and Anglican priest married C.S. Lewis and Joy Davidson in the hospital. They celebrated life together as husband and wife for three glorious years during the gift of a surprise remission prior to the shadow of Joy's death.

The film, "Shadowlands" is a poignant portrayal of their relationship. The light of their faith and the strength of their love sustained them as they walked through the shadows of life's challenges, shining amid the dark places of suffering and death.

Today we give thanks that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus who joined us in our humanity, embracing joy and sorrow, walking through the shadows of life's challenges with light, kindness, and grace, and conquering death by dying on a cross.

As we come down from the mountain of the transfiguration into a world of shadows and shattered places, may the light of Christ sustain and strengthen us. It is precisely amid life, at times routine and at times fragile, that God's light shines: sometimes like a lighthouse's revolving beacon persistently searching the dark, sometimes like the gradually progressive rays at early dawn, sometimes overwhelming in its brilliance, and other times no brighter than a flickering candle...yet, still shining.

Thanks be to God. Amen.