

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Transfiguration Sunday: August 6, 2023

“Divine Glory”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on this Sunday, Transfiguration Sunday. In our Old Testament reading we begin with Moses' transfiguration after experiencing God. The reaction from everyone, of course, was fear.

Terror in the face of Divine glory is, in fact, quite consistent in the Biblical tradition. Moses' shining face strikes fear into the hearts of the Israelites, not confidence or delight. The eventual veiling of Moses' face before the people suggests, in the same manner as the cloud that will ultimately enfold Jesus' disciples, that the Divine presence is not meant to be experienced directly by the senses. It is beyond our ability to receive or comprehend.

We hear this repeated in the Psalm as we confess the Holy One to be great and awesome, and along with this description comes fear. But what, are we really afraid of? Are we afraid to admit that God is that awesome and powerful? Are we afraid to admit that miracles can happen? Are we afraid to admit we are not in control like we think we are?

It is interesting that in Moses' case it wasn't from God that he needed to hide or place a veil, but instead from the people who were not ready to

handle the proof that God had been in their presence. That now there were rules and a code of life. That maybe they were not as important as they thought they were, maybe they were not in charge of their world.

For Moses - imagine not being afraid to stand in front of God, imperfections and all. Moses does this. He doesn't veil himself to God, but veils God's presence to the people.

In Jesus' case, "The appearance of his face changed," Luke tells us in today's Gospel. "His clothes became dazzling white." The other texts in Mark and Matthew are similar. It is brightness and light, like a person staring directly into the noonday sun, that characterizes the nature of the Transfiguration. Yet the result is terror and confusion, not pleasure or jubilation. It is fear that characterizes the reactions of those present. Yet what should we learn from Moses' radiance or Jesus' light?

Moses did not, and we cannot, hide ourselves from God (which as we all know is impossible anyway.) And Jesus was humbled before God in prayer. Both men were simply in front of their creator, with nothing to hide. Yet the result of their grace caused others to fear. What could that possibly mean?

Maybe both Moses and Jesus are modeling freedom - yes, freedom. Over the last few weeks of Jesus has been teaching about weeds, wheat and yeast; telling us there is good and bad in the world and we are not the ones able to judge the difference. We have the ultimate example of coming in prayer to God, and allowing ourselves to be seen, to be vulnerable, to allow God to transform us, to imbue us with light. And to free us to let us let go, and let God. In other words, total freedom.

We are free from terror because we, unlike Moses' people and unlike the disciples, know the rest of the story. We don't see the light, we don't see the radiance as something to be afraid of. We see it as love. We see it as a physical sign of God's grace. God's grace which helps lead Moses' people, and God's grace that would give strength to that motley crew of disciples as they prepare to lose Jesus. Most of all, we see that grace and light in the resurrection of our Lord.

Perhaps it is freedom, more than anything—more than terror—that we should receive from the Transfiguration account. That is, how free God is to be more than we can understand; how free God is to shatter our categories of what is worthy and what is not; how free God is in his desire for us to be the dazzling radiance of all-encompassing love, no matter how broken our bodies, minds or hearts.

And what did the disciples see when they looked at the transfigured Jesus? They saw God the Father, imbuing love to his son in preparation for what lay next. God, like a human parent, wants to imbue strength and purpose to his son. God knew that humanity was not ready to hear Jesus' "love one another," or the blessed be attitudes.

But also for the disciples, they now know that Jesus is the Messiah for the Jewish people, connected with Moses and Elijah both of whom had experienced a direct connection with God. The ancient symbolism was fulfilled. This sign to them meant freedom from the slavery they were experiencing within Roman rule and religious politics.

We know the transfiguration began the path to the Cross. We also know that the work of transforming our world into one where loving God and loving neighbor can begin to bring in God's kingdom now is going to take work and self-reflection. And we are asked again, can we face God? Can we actually have a come-to-Jesus moment where we can let go of anything holding us back from being filled with the light and love of God? Is there anything you need to be freed from?

I call upon you this Pentecost season of spiritual growth, to allow Jesus' gift of grace, love and light to transform and transfigure whatever is holding you back, whatever you are fearing and whatever is keeping you from experiencing freedom and peace. Amen.