

March 3, 2019, "God's Light Revealed", Rev. Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson

Luke 9:28-43

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

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. 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 Elijah" —not knowing what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 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.

The next day, when Jesus, Peter, John, and James had come down from the mountain, a large crowd met Jesus. A man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to take a look at my son, my only child. Look, a spirit seizes him and, without any warning, he screams. It shakes him and causes him to foam at the mouth. It tortures him and rarely leaves him alone. I begged your disciples to throw it out, but they couldn't."

Jesus answered, "You faithless and crooked generation, how long will I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon threw him down and shook him violently. Jesus spoke harshly to the unclean

spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father. Everyone was overwhelmed by God's greatness.

Will you pray with me?

Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I don't know how much you have been following what has been happening in the United Methodist Church this last week or so. As a clergy person, it has been hard to miss, and my heart has been with all of my UMC colleagues and lay siblings. There was a gathering of 800 delegates from around the world to make a decision on inclusion of LGBTQ folks: whether or not to recognize the ordination of LGBTQ clergy. whether or not to allow ministers to preside at same sex weddings. Whether or not to claim that sexuality is a sin or part of the fearful and wonderful way that God has made us.

For our congregation, what's been happening for the Methodists hits a little close to home. Perhaps a little too close. We, like the Methodists hold differing beliefs around sexuality and how it relates to our faith. Some of us worry about whether the new minister (me!) will MAKE the congregation open and affirming. Some of us worry that we should be open and affirming already, and by golly it's taking too long.

I want you all to hear that this will not be my decision to make -- it will be ours, a decision we make together. And before we even think about decisions, before we even engage with THIS particular question, we need to practice listening with love and speaking honestly and openly with one another. We need to practice discerning -- that deep work of prayerful listening to the God who is still speaking and asking God to lead us and to show us the way forward.

Now what does any of this have to do with the Transfiguration? What does any of this have to do with Peter, John and James up on the mountain with Jesus? What does it have to do with God's pronouncement: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"?

The story of the Transfiguration is an Epiphany story.

And no, not simply because it shows up at the end of the liturgical season of Epiphany. The Transfiguration is an epiphany story because it tells of sudden revelation and insight. This is, after all, what epiphany means -- sudden revelation and insight.

In the transfiguration, Jesus' identity is revealed:

as a prophet in the tradition of the great Hebrew prophets Moses and Elijah.

And as the messiah, God's chosen one, to whom we are to listen.

Neither of these identities should come as a surprise to Peter, John and James. Only a week earlier, our text tells us, Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ, sent from God."

Yet, here we are, a week and a mountain climb later, and Peter, James and John are awe-struck and amazed by the revelation of who Jesus is.

The thing about epiphanies is that most of the time, they reveal something that has been right in front of us. NOT something that was hidden but instead something that simply was not seen.

Epiphanies are not about the world changing.

They are about US changing how WE SEE the world.

Okay, you say, but you still haven't told us what this has to do with the Methodist Church. You still haven't told us why you brought up sexuality and sexual orientation.

Quit making us uncomfortable!

Jim Wallis, Chief Editor of Sojourners Magazine reflects on the way that the whole conversation within the Methodist Church, the almost-evenly-split vote to strengthen the church's "traditional" ban against LGBTQ clergy and marriages reflects a larger culture in which we choose division over the messy, complicated and vulnerable work of sticking together.

Even in the church, perhaps especially in the church, we are struggling to choose relationship, to choose to be part of a church with people we don't like or agree with, to choose "to try to follow Jesus with the other people who are called to him."

Within the framework of division, though, we pit ourselves against one another, one side right and the other side wrong. So desperately do we want to win by changing the people around us that we miss what is right in front of us. We miss the chance to CHANGE HOW WE SEE EACH OTHER! We miss the chance to have our eyes opened to see that we are all Christians trying the best we know how to follow Christ.

Hear the words of 15,529 young Methodists from around the world who signed and presented this statement to the special convention leadership:

"We the young people of the United Methodist Church are not of one mind when it comes to inclusion of our LGBTQ siblings in Christ. And yet through working together, sharing stories, and worshiping side by side **we have seen each other's gifts and fruits for ministry! We have witnessed the incredible ways that God is working through each of us in**

our own unique contexts. We believe that if we are truly a body we need each other. We need one another, in all of our diversity -- to fulfill our call to be the Body of Christ.”

This is an Epiphany -- the sudden revelation and insight of something that has been in front of us all along. If we are truly a body, we need each other. We need one another, in all of our diversity -- to fulfill our call to be the Body of Christ. This does not mean it will be easy. This does not mean it will not be messy. It does not mean that there will not be times when we need to make some sort of decision together about which we do not all agree. But it does mean that we are called to listen lovingly, to speak honestly and to see one another as beloved siblings, children of God each of us created in God's image.

There on that mountain top, Peter, John and James had an epiphany -- their eyes were opened to Christ's identity as prophet and Chosen of God. They were awestruck. And terrified. Because sometimes the truth is both awesome and terrifying.

This Epiphany season, we have been paying attention to God's light in our lives and in our community. We have heard stories, old and new, about God's love and grace and trustworthiness. We have laughed and cried together, celebrated together.

We have been church together. And one of the gifts and beauties of this place, of First Congregational Church of Loveland, is that we know we need each other in all of our beautiful, messy, complicated, and rich diversity.

This morning, I have invited Karen Jazowski and Julie Ferguson to share about how they have been paying attention to God's light in their lives -- and what difference (if any!) a little star charm and a word on a slip of paper has made.

As we prepare to hear their stories, let us pray.

Gracious and holy God,

We thank you that we are different,

that we hold different ideas about how best to follow you.

and yet that you still bring us together

here in this place to be your body.

Gracious and holy God,

The work of being your church and bringing our whole selves

is vulnerable, messy, sometimes scary, sometimes painful

and also powerful and lifegiving work.

Open our eyes, that we may see your light.

Open our ears, that we may listen to your son.

Open our hearts, that we may know your call to each of us and to all of us together.

Break us open to receive your grace and love.

Break us open, that we may love ourselves, one another and you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.