

“Coming Into One’s Own”

A Sermon on Luke 9:28-36

Written for the people of St. Lucas UCC, 3/17/2019

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I guess you can take the teacher out of Sunday school, but you can never take the Sunday school out of the teacher. I learned that about myself this week. For as I was preparing my remarks for you this morning, I was remembering fondly my many years of teaching this story to the children of the church. In fact, this story, the Transfiguration of Christ, was one of my very favorites to teach because it is just perfect for digging through the costume closet and putting on a play. I say this because there is a setting, scenery to create - this mountain top, and plenty of characters to cast. Not every couplet of wisdom or instructional verses lends itself to such a drama, and lots of the Jesus stories are set as just Jesus and a crowd, but in this story - everyone can get involved. We need disciples with head coverings, and prophets with doll rod scrolls, and Jesus of course, with a glow stick prop, and then even God has a speaking part. I used to cast the youngest child as God, perhaps figuring that they were closest to our source, and perhaps because no one portrays God quite as delightfully as a tiny girl in pigtails. After the togas are on and the make shift mountain constructed, typically by deconstructing the couches, I’d call “action” and the characters would pantomime their parts as one of the older children read the passage aloud. We would laugh and be dramatic and turn of the lights before the big glow stick moment, and it was never lost on me how this ancient story can still come to life today and inspire future generations of Christians to be radiant thanks be to God.

After some very over the top bows and the applause of myself and my fellow parent helper, we would all sit down in a circle on the rug together so we could talk about what’s happening in the story. What is Jesus up to? And what do learn about God.

I have many memories teaching this story because it's one of the stories we look at every year in the church. One of the stories the lectionary circles back to again and again, revisiting it as often as we do Christmas and Easter, annually. So, circle up friends, and let's ponder this story together and think about what we can learn about Following Christ and what we can observe about God, now that we have heard the passage anew again this year.

It turns out that what I liked best about the story for Sunday schoolers still applies, for it is a story about community. Many characters stand to remind us all that we aren't in this alone. That though we are called to work out our faith in fear and trembling, we are most certainly assured that we need not do that alone. We have a community of faith, and of course a direct connection with God. Alone is only an illusion. We belong to each other, and we belong to God. We are in covenant with one another, a body of Christ, and in covenant with God too – an ancient covenant that God has been keeping for generations, since the days of Abraham. Those gathered in this story form a cosmic community because we have these prophets, Moses and Elijah, these souls that have gone before. Just like we are ever mindful of the ones in our own lives that have gone before us. Here at St Lucas we share our grounds with those who have gone before us, and our Spirit too, as it has been nurtured and shaped one generation to the next. On the shoulders of the saints we all stand. Saints like Irene Spinner, whom I was not lucky enough to meet, and yet I still find myself thinking about her. I think about how she lived her life in such a way that even a new person to the community, one who came after her death, would be inspired by her loving way of being in the world. All of us are caught up in this story together, a story about God and People, that transcends Heaven and Earth.

Now maybe there aren't quite enough parts for each of you, but I still wonder, which role are you playing now in your life? Are you like a prophet imagining a future with hope? Speaking up and speaking out about God's dream for justice and righteousness? If so, thank you, because we need those loud prophetic voices now more than ever before. Or are you like Peter? Who goes down in Christian

history as getting this one wrong, confused, but perhaps that really isn't fair? After all, who blame him for wanting to hold on to that magnificence just a little bit longer? Is that where you are today, holding on? If so, be gentle to yourself, for you are ok too. Or are you like Jesus, experiencing a time of radiance and coming into your own. That's how Christ transfigures. Don't let the prefix fool you, transfigure is different from transform. You see, it isn't a major change, a 180, or a pivot. this isn't a pivot or a 180 turn. Jesus didn't go up the mountain a derelict and come down a Christ, rather Jesus become more brilliant, glowing, an even deeper expression of his own true self. This is true for us too. We can come into our own. We can find deep inner peace. And when we do, we glow. Have you been lucky enough to see your child hold their child? Didn't they glow? You see we can have these transcendent, mountain top experiences too, though they need not be on a mountain top. It's following Christ and seeking God *in prayer* that will bring about that most glorious change. That's when we can radiate, and beam. We can be the people we were called to be. We can, if we don't sell ourselves short first.

Of course, faith isn't stagnant, and neither is life, so we can play all those parts at different points on our journey. There's a time for glowing, and a time for misunderstanding, and a time for listening to this wisdom of the past, and a time for going back down the mountain into and into the thick of it. Indeed, there is a time for every purpose under heaven.

After we've seen Jesus and his disciples and the prophets too, we actually hear from God. For in the transfiguration, God too is up to something great. If God's line in this story sounds familiar to you, it's because we've heard it almost exactly the same, when Christ emerged from the water of the river Jordan at his own baptism. At that moment Luke describes, "the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased". Let's note that God was well pleased before this transfiguration, and well pleased after it.

Think about that, God's firm stance of love and acceptance was there before Jesus went up the mountain and after he came back down too. Just like God loves us in our before and our after's, just the same. That's the thing about God. God loves us just exactly as we are, *and* has a dream for our lives too. Not either or, but both. God is the god of our broken selves and our best selves too, for we are God's children. God's beloved. Always. And here we can stand in awe and wonder praising a God that is both our rock is also a God that is constantly making all things new. God of Constant and God of Constantly Changing. God of well, everything.

Circle time could get off topic, just like sermons can stray, but the take away I most wanted the children to have is the same I want for you young at heart too. I want you to see that for God, you don't have to change. You were, are, and always will be beloved. But, following Christ will lead you to your best self. Your most radiant self comes from God. So be inspired to imagine with God your very best self, all the while knowing that you are loved exactly as you are. That you can be both a masterpiece and a work in progress at the same time.

Thanks be, to God.