

Wesley United Methodist Church
February 14, 2021
Learning What Jesus Values
Reflecting God
Scripture: Mark 9:2-9

In the secular calendar, today, Valentine's Day is a day traditionally devoted to love and romance. In the church's calendar, today, Transfiguration Day, reminds us that true love is transformative. Transfiguration Day marks the transition from the season of Epiphany to the beginning of Lent – it's a day when we see Jesus on a mountaintop, with Moses, the great Liberator of the Hebrew Scripture and with Elijah, the great Prophet. We hear about how Jesus was transfigured, how he glowed, how his clothes became dazzling white.

Peter, James, and John had gone up the mountain with Jesus. There are so many things we could focus on in this rich story, but today I want to remind us that we have been following stories of Jesus' ministry to learn what Jesus valued. We have seen how Jesus valued us understanding God's call in our lives, how he valued teamwork and called us to work together as members of God's team. We have seen how Jesus taught with authority and authenticity and expects us to also be authentic in our relationship with God. We saw Jesus being very clear that God set his priorities and ours. Today we see how all of these come together in our lives when we reflect God in our daily lives.

On the mountain, the disciples were awed, overwhelmed, and frightened by seeing Jesus with Moses and Elijah. Jewish tradition believed that either Moses or Elijah or both would return to earth when God's kingdom arrived. They knew something amazing was happening. And then, they heard a voice from heaven declaring, "This is my Son, the Beloved, Listen to him." On the mountain, seeing Jesus with the two greatest figures of Jewish history, they are directed to Jesus, the teacher they were following around, more than just a teacher, declared by God to be God's Son, to be Beloved, and the one to whom they were to listen, the One to whom they were to pay attention. He is also the One to whom we are to listen, the One to whom we are to pay attention.

What becomes clear in the Transfiguration is that Jesus shows us all that we can ever hope to know about God, in him we see the full presence of God in our world and in him we find the way forward for the world. Jesus is the full reflection of God's love. On the mountaintop, they are to understand that in seeing Jesus transfigured, they are seeing God, they are seeing that God intends Jesus' way of peace, selfless love, compassion, and sacrifice to be the way forward. They are seeing that Jesus is the true and full reflection of God.

"This is my Son, the Beloved; Listen to him."

This is the message for us as we are also called to reflect all that we know of God in our daily lives. As people of God, we are to reflect, to embody this new way forward. Our lives are to be a reflection of God for others.

So, that sounds pretty scary, doesn't it? But let's stop and think about that for a minute.

Frequently when we look at a baby or a child, we can see a resemblance to one or both of their parents. Sometimes what they say or do reminds us of their parents or grandparents, or a sibling. It's not intentional on their part, it's just part of who they are.

God is part of who we are in ways that we may not even realize. What we believe about God is reflected in the way we live. A poem written by Dorothy Law Nolte called Children Learn What They Live helps to illustrate this.

"Children learn what they live. If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn. If children live with hostility, they learn to fight. If children live with ridicule, they learn to be shy. If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

"If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence. If children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient. If children live with praise, they learn to appreciate. If children live with acceptance, they learn to love. If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves. If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness. If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and others. If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live."ⁱ

I would suggest to you that this is even more true about what we have been taught to believe about God. If we believe that God is looking to judge us, always looking to catch us doing something wrong, then we are likely to do the same thing with

others. If, on the other hand, we believe that God is love, that God loves each and every person then we will also live with love as our guiding principle as the model for our lives.

You see, this experience on the mountain wasn't meant to be something to be frozen in time and preserved forever. It was meant to provide strength to come down from the mountain and to face what is ahead in life. Just before this event, Jesus had been trying to explain to the disciples that he would be facing death. Of course, they didn't understand.

So Jesus did what we normally did. We went off to be with God. Normally, he would go off alone. You might remember last week, that after spending hours healing people, the next morning Jesus went off by himself to pray. When his disciples came looking for him, they were eager for him to go back and begin another busy day of healing people and becoming popular. He surprised them by saying that they were leaving to go to other villages to teach because that was why he came.

He knew his priorities. He knew that to do God's work, he needed to be closely connected with God. He needed to spend time with God. This time, his disciples also needed an experience of the real presence of God. They needed to be on that mountain and hear God's proclamation about who Jesus was. Jesus needed this before he could actually walk to Jerusalem and face death. His disciples needed this experience so that they could also face what the future would hold.

Our mountaintop experiences are meant to provide us with courage, hope, and strength to live in the daily world, to face the future unafraid and with hope and confidence.

As I read this scripture, I found myself thinking about Martin Luther King Jr and his famous speech that we've come to call, "I've been to the Mountaintop." It was during the sanitation strike in Memphis when he spoke to rally people on April 3, 1968. He rallied people to support the sanitation workers, and to come together in non-violent ways to make a difference.

Near the end of his speech, he spoke these now famous words, "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop ... Like anybody, I would

like to live - a long life ... But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."ⁱⁱ

When he talked about the mountaintop, he was looking back to Moses, after leading the Hebrew people through the wilderness for 40 years, looking and seeing the promised land, but knowing that he, himself, would never actually enter the promised land.

Earlier in the speech, King said that if God were to offer to let him live in any period of history, he would "turn to the Almighty, and say, 'If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy'. Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around. That's a strange statement, but I know somehow that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way are responding – something is happening in our world."ⁱⁱⁱ

He had been to the mountain, but he knew that the mountain top was not his dwelling place. He came down to the streets. He came to walk with the sanitation workers in Memphis. He came down to face whatever was to come. He believed that God was a God of love and a God of peace and non-violence and he preached that in everything he did. It was in the very fiber of his being.

It was the reason he could say on that day, that he didn't know what the future would hold, but he was at peace with it. He didn't live to see the promised land. In fact, the very next day, he was assassinated. The time that he described in that speech, sounds all too familiar today. We are still waiting to fully live in that promised land.

In the meanwhile, as we heard in our opening song, it is the cry of our hearts to be close to God, to follow God all the days of our lives. We ask God to teach us God's holy ways so that we can walk in God's truth. We pray for God to open our eyes so that

we can see all the wonderful things that God does. We ask God to open our hearts more and more so that we can be fully devoted to God.^{iv}

In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he wrote, there is "nothing between us and God. Our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so, we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him. Since God has so generously let us in on what he is doing, we're not about to throw up our hands and walk off the job just because we run into occasional hard times. We refuse to wear masks and play games. We don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves. Rather we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God.

Although we may wear masks now to protect ourselves and others from COVID 19, we do not wear masks to hide from God, or to protect ourselves. Rather we live to reflect God in all that we are and all that we do.

Gwyneth Arrison is a pastor in Bath Maine, who shared a prayer this week about being a reflection of God. Let us pray:

"Glorious God, Bright Morning Star, Light of the World, We ask you to share your glorious light in all our darkness. ... We turn to you now whether for the first time or the thousandth time. We bask in the glory of your Face transfigured before us. We will not turn away, we will no longer hide behind curtains. ... Together we will gaze into the glory of your love. For through Christ, your 'new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold.' Shine in our hearts, Lord, that we might know your glory seen in the face of our Lord, Jesus Christ. May we reflect your light to encourage one another as your church. And let us be mirrors to the world, shining your glorious love into the dark world, so that through us your might lead many others to know your hope, freedom and transformed life as we do. Shine Jesus Shine. Amen.^v

ⁱ Nolte, Dorothy Law. C. 1972 This is the author's approved short version. [Microsoft Word - CLWTL short w:web DOX copy.docx \(storage.googleapis.com\)](#)

ⁱⁱ King, Jr. Martin Luther. "I've Been to the Mountaintop" 4/3/1968 ["I've Been to the Mountaintop" by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. | American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees \(AFSCME\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} From "Cry of My Heart"

^v Arrison, Gwyneth Rev. Pastor of Bath UMC, Bath, Maine. Shared in Daily Prayer from New England Annual Conference.