**St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church**

**Last Sunday after the Epiphany**

**Transfiguration Sunday**

**Exodus 34 29-35**

**Psalm 99**

**2 Corinthians 3: 12-4:2**

**Luke 9:28-36**

***Gates of Hope***

Some people are very good at remembering dreams, but I am not one of them. Most usually, I remember remnants of dreams upon waking, and over time, only fragments of dreams stay in my memory. Once in a while, however, a dream will seem so lifelike, fantastic as it may seem, that it stays with me as a guidepost for living. One dream I shall never forget, and I shall never come to the end of Epiphany again without recalling it. As I can best remember it, it was like this.

I was moving slowly, seeming to float really, between two high walls…they must have been hundreds of feet high, made of very old bronzed, iron with a softly aged patina and glow which flowed over countless shapes sculpted into the iron. At first glance, the shapes reminded me of those grotesque gargoyles one sometimes sees protecting doorways or in the crenelated towers of old castles. But at closer look one could see all manner of shapes …people mostly…along with some wild animals of nature…..diverse in character and circumstance…….all protruding from the wall …..permanent guardians of what I could now make out to be iron gates far ahead, appearing quite small at first, due to the distance. There seemed to be glass insets in the upper arches of the gates and behind the glass I saw a faint flickering light. The light seemed to beckon and invite one to enter through the gates, and I was curious to find out more. Without seeming to move at all, and yet aware of my coming ever closer to the gates, the iron figures did not hinder my passage and indeed once past, the wordless figures simply faded fast behind me.

As I continued toward the gothic arches of the great iron gates, I could begin to perceive that there were more carvings up along the sides, over the top and on the gates themselves. As I drew closer, I struggled to understand what I was seeing. The questions arose in my heart about what manner of creatures these were, and I began to question whether they were friendly creatures or out to destroy me. The light behind the gates seemed at times to flicker more like fire, and the creatures changed their features back and forth, friendly to menacing and back again. For a fleeting moment, I was confused, and then I seemed to instinctively recognize the guile of that light…..beckoning me on, seducing me into thinking I knew how to navigate it. And I remember beginning to chant silently…..help me decide… God….. No…I will not go through your gates if you are not God…I will not go to you if you are not whom you pretend to be….I will not go if you are not God….and God will let me know….I trust in God… I trust in God.

I kept up this mantra as my body slipped up the sides of the gates and I somehow knew them to be Gates of Indecision and Denial. Suddenly I felt myself lifted up and over the top of the gates into a serene midnight beyond and I noticed my body was now weightless and free.

I was no longer surrounded by those iron walls, and found myself drawing closer to another, far brighter source of light. I was no longer alone but one of many. All were smiling and with faces and clothing reflecting light that was difficult to look at, it was so bright. I wondered if I looked the same, but I couldn’t tell….. I didn’t really understand what was happening and I wanted someone to tell me that I was on the right path. Yet somehow I knew I had to keep moving toward the light which began to throb with increasing brightness……brighter….brighter….

And then I woke up.

And the first words that came out of my mouth when I recognized my bedroom were “Thanks be to God!”

But there was also a sense of disappointment….I was so curious to see that light and know it at last….so close….so close….

I’m sure I was thankful to find I was safe in my own home again….but I was sure in the moment and I am sure now, that I was also thankful for the revelation of the dream.

Perhaps, in the waning light of Epiphany, as in the waning moments of an extraordinary dream, one yearns for it all to begin it again. To relive the trembling desire to live into the light of whatever lies ahead. As we basked in the new light that shone over all the earth at Christmas, our eyes fixed on the bright star leading the way to a divine light on earth lying in a manger, we longed to keep it, hold on to it, not forget its bright promise of peace on earth, good will to all.

The message of Christmas, like a fading dream or like a mountain top fading into the distance as we fly past, losing its color and shape until we begin to lose sight of it completely. And then all is dark again….and there seems nothing left to connect to, and we are left to imagine the memory of it as we fly on. So it is as we come to the last moments of Epiphany, still clinging to the sweet reminder of the Star over Bethlehem as we glide on toward Ash Wednesday and Lent.

Yet, like the mountain top moving by us, it’s drama does not pass by us unnoticed. The movement from Epiphany into Lent is punctuated by its own drama, a particularly startling, fantastic occurrence in the life of Jesus and his disciples.

Luke tells us that Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a mountain top to pray and “while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white.”(v29) It is a moment of glorious illumination of the divine nature of Jesus….not the Jesus we met as the child of God, lying in a manger. Not the Jesus we know as teacher and healer, friend of the marginalized on the dusty streets of Galilee….. but Jesus as he approaches the completion of his life on earth, coming near to his own departure. Jesus, recognized now as completely and utterly glorified and embraced by God.

Jesus is not alone with his disciples in this moment of recognition. Luke’s version of this mountain-top story us that at the moment of Jesus’ transformation he was joined by two of the most revered prophets Peter, Hames and John would have known. Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about the coming turning point in his life… the time for him to turn his steps toward Jerusalem and his inevitable departure from his ministry on earth.

The time for change had come to Jesus, and as God’s chosen one, he was transformed by a light so bright that it was difficult to recognize him in the moment. The disciples had been with Jesus for some time, witnessing all manner of miracles, but it was in this moment, according to Luke, that “they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him” (32b) They had seen his compassion and heard his teaching, yet they had never seen anything like this.

For Peter and for the other disciples it must have been, as it is for us, hard to understand…hard to grasp ….this sudden, unexpected almost blinding transfiguration. It must have seemed dreamlike and surreal. Yet, just as in our dreams, we are much more than mere spectators, the disciples who accompanied Jesus on that day participated fully and completely in the sight and sound of everything that transpired on that day, and in doing so, they too, would be transformed.

And now we are invited to move toward participation in this transfiguration -- to surrender to it in whatever circumstances we find it. We are not merely spectators, and are called to and enter into the experience of Jesus with our own desire for transformation. In doing so, we are given a glimpse into what it means to come closer to God and all that God wants us to be. “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Said Jesus. (John 8:12)

As Jesus prepares for his departure, he leaves us with the belief that as the children of Light, we, too are equipped to be empowered by the power of the Spirit to act in Jesus’ name.

I believe my dream was a dream about choice…. and this re-telling of what seemed like a dream to the disciples is also a message about choosing which path we are to follow, the path toward the light of God, or what worldly path we think might merely please God.

On this Transfiguration Sunday, Jesus shows us an example of what it means to be completely and utterly obedient to God and what it means to be recognized and embraced and transformed by God’s holy light.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid…… let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matt 5:14-16)

This Transfiguration Sunday offers this encouragement to prepare ourselves for total abandonment to God’s will for our own transformation.

In a world that seems beyond saving, we are called to enter into this transformation; to reach always toward the Light, to pray, to give ourselves to service, and to work for justice and peace. We are called to participate with God in transfiguring God’s creation so filled with despair and brokenness, by death in our streets, and now, yet again, war between our nations. With Jesus, Moses and Elijah, we are called to enter into transformative action which shines with the good news of hope for the world.

It sounds like a dream, but is it? And, how will we know unless we allow ourselves to move past the gates of our own denial to discover what truths and strengths are revealed in the light of our own transformation.

On this Transfiguration Sunday, we are called to prepare ourselves for our own personal transformative Lent, giving up all that is not contributory to God’s creation and taking on all that is just that. It sounds like a tall order, yet it can begin anywhere and in any way. The only requirement for us is to hold on to the transformative Divine Light that is bequeathed to us and that has the power to banish the darkness.

For as St. Paul said, “All of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, ae being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

The time has come for us make up our minds how we will approach the imaginary walls through which we must pass during Lent to reach Easter….with sincerity, courage, with strength, with joyous anticipation even in our contemplation and, yes, perhaps even our deprivation. The time has come for us to build rather than destroy, to create with God rather than to tear down, to stand strong in the light of God’s transforming message of peace and love in the world and to be obedient to that message, no matter the consequences.

Listen again to the words from our collect today: “Beholding by faith the light of his countenance may we be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness form glory to glory.”

As we approach Ash Wednesday, we begin our journey toward a different dream for the world, and if we are willing to submit ourselves to God’s transforming grace, we will reach the gates that will open onto another explosion of light, filled with hope and renewal.

That is the measure of Transfiguration, which carries within it the holy light of Easter, carrying us with it as in a dream, buoyed up by faith, always onward to the place where yet again, we will discover the star still shining down on shepherds in their fields, always waiting to lead us, like the wise men of Epiphany, away by another road, through the Gates of Hope and beyond.

Amen

Written to the Glory of God

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February 27, 2022