

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
February 19, 2023 – The Last Sunday after the Epiphany  
Matthew 17:1-9  
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Every year on the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday we celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ and remember the vision of Christ's glory given to his disciples, Peter, James, and John. Our Gospel lesson begins "Six days later..." The Transfiguration of Christ occurred six days after Jesus had first told his disciples about the suffering and death he was facing and about his resurrection. Matthew wrote: "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matthew 16:21). Then, a few days later, on the mountain Jesus is revealed, the dazzling light of his glory forever tied to his journey to Jerusalem, to his death, and to his resurrection. On the mountain Jesus receives God's confirmation: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

At the Transfiguration, we get a glimpse of Jesus' divine nature. On that mountain Jesus does not look like other men. His divine origin and the divine power with which he is filled are revealed in dazzling light. White light – the color of purity, of light without darkness. Dazzling white light that shone around his ordinary physical body, the body so well known to Peter, James, and John, the body that will hang, broken, on the cross.

When the disciples followed Jesus up the mountain, they caught a glimpse of a different realm. They saw Moses and Elijah and Jesus' divinity revealed through his humanity as dazzling white light. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Peter was right when he declared to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." It is good when we catch a glimpse of divine reality. And it is good for us to reflect on these experiences and to allow them to inform the rest of our lives. Have you had moments of feeling God's love for you or for someone else? Have you ever felt especially united to God? Have you been "lost" in worship or in prayer? Swept up in the power of the Holy Spirit? Have you known God's healing power in your life or the life of someone you love? Have you experienced the peace which passes all understanding or felt a deep assurance that God will make all things well? It is good for us to dwell on these experiences, to treasure them in our hearts.

When I was in seminary, for one year I lived on campus during the week and went home for weekends. On a particular Sunday I wasn't feeling very well, but I went back to school that afternoon anyway because I had a mid-term exam the next morning. But I became worse as the evening went on. I tried to sleep but fever made me restless. I was alone in my small, dark room. In the middle of the night, I reached my hand out in the empty darkness and prayed, "Jesus, please help me!" And I felt his hand take mine. Some people might say it was my fever that caused some kind of "hallucination." But every time I consider how God has touched my life, I remember that night twenty years ago. The experience was brief, but it was real. I wasn't miraculously healed, but I was assured of God's presence. Reflecting on that experience can give me comfort still and strengthen my faith. If you have had experiences of God – as I'm sure you have – I suggest you dwell with them and dwell on them often.

On this last Sunday before Ash Wednesday, I want to encourage you to plan to make the season of Lent a special time. There are many, many ways to do that. Traditionally, Lent is a time for fasting and prayer, and increased charitable giving. Of course, Lent is a season of repentance, when we are called to recollect and change what we know is keeping us from receiving God's love and from growing in faith and in love for God, our neighbors and ourselves. We are all at different points in our spiritual growth. That means that each of us will have different blocks to faith and love – "sins," if you want to use that language. So, we will have different paths of repentance.

Approaching Lent, my thoughts turn repeatedly to gratitude. And one vignette from the Gospel of Luke comes to me over and over again. Let me share it with you.

"On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'" (Luke 17:11-19)

I am haunted by the words of Jesus: "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" I ask myself how often I am among the "other nine." I have been healed and rescued and blessed by God over the years in more ways than I can recall. But how often do I thank God? How often do I meditate with awe and wonder on all that God has done in my life? Do I go on my way, taking God's blessings for granted? The nine lepers did just that. They were healed of their leprosy, yes. But think about what Jesus said to the grateful Samaritan: "your faith has made you well." A better translation of this phrase is "your faith has saved you." Salvation – something far more than the healing of disease – came to the man who was thankful. Blessing and thanksgiving make the full circle of healing, of wholeness, of salvation.

I suspect that I am not alone in recognizing that I should grow in gratitude to God. "Human nature" and the culture we live in work against us in this. Don't we tend to complain about our problems rather than count our blessings? Aren't we encouraged to desire more and more instead of being satisfied with what we have, to forget how privileged and blessed we are?

Perhaps this Lent we might all grow in gratitude to God for all our blessings, not forgetting the precious blessing of our faith and of our beloved church. Gratitude will bring us joy, joy that we can share with our neighbors, and the circle of salvation will go on. In Jesus' name. Amen.