

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
February 11, 2024 – The Last Sunday after the Epiphany
Mark 9: 2-9
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

As you may remember, every year on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday the Gospel reading is an account of the Transfiguration of Christ. This year we have Mark's brief description of this important event.

In recent sermons I have related what Mark teaches, that in Jesus the reign of God has come near. When we see what Jesus does, we see God in action. We see evil subdued, diseases cured, strength given to the powerless, and the brokenhearted healed. We see a man who looks like other men, even as he reveals his extraordinary authority and power.

At the Transfiguration, we get a glimpse of Jesus' divine nature. Jesus does not look like other men on that mountain. 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.

When Jesus was on the mountain, transfigured in the presence of his disciples, he talked with Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest men in the history of Israel. Much can be said about these companions of Jesus on the mountain – I've said some of it to you in the last two years – but today I want to focus on one point. On the mountain Jesus was not transformed or made different from who he was on other days. He was revealed. Jesus was seen by his closest friends for who he was and is – God's Son, divine as well as human.

Recently I have been re-reading the children's books written by George MacDonald. You may not be familiar with him. He was a 19th century Scottish author, poet, and Christian minister. He wrote several stories for children, as well as adult works of fantasy/fiction. MacDonald influenced two authors I'm sure you do know – C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

Two books recount the adventures of a young princess and a miner boy named Curdie – *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*. Curdie must battle goblins and other evil creatures as well as a good many bad men and women in order to rescue the princess and her father, the king. The divine figure in these stories is female, the great-great grandmother. She appears to people – when she does appear – in different forms, sometimes as a very old woman bent over her spinning wheel and, very occasionally, as a strong, beautiful, radiant woman. She helps Curdie in many ways as he undertakes the task of saving the princess and the king.

In one encounter, she grants Curdie an extraordinary gift. He becomes able to take the hand of another person or creature and "feel" their true nature, "feel" who or what they are becoming. He might take the hand of an ordinary man and feel the paw of a monkey or the hoof of a pig. He might take the paw of an ugly beast and feel the soft hand of a woman. Curdie was thereby able to know whom he could trust and who was an enemy of the princess and king.

We can imagine how useful such a gift could be as we navigate the world. What people we could avoid, what false paths we might steer away from, if only we could see the truth about others. And what friends we might make, what work we might pour ourselves into, if only we could see the truth about others.

We don't have the gift given to Curdie, but we do have moments of revelation from time to time which may guide our lives. Recently I was speaking with a friend whose only daughter died tragically. At this time in my friend's life, the nature of her friends was revealed to her in a special way. You may have had this experience. I have. My friend was able to see clearly who was able to be present with her in her grief and share her pain and who avoided sharing her grief and pain, saying hurtful words like "it's been three months, aren't you better yet?" That's just one example of how moments of crisis or special need reveal to us who will help and who will not, who is trustworthy when we are most vulnerable and who is not.

Of course, as we live our lives and respond to others' needs, we reveal ourselves, as individuals and as a church. In Jesus' teaching we have clear guidance about the behavior that matters to God. Please re-read The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25. This is a parable of the final judgment, and righteous behavior is clearly outlined: feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison. Jesus teaches us that when we do these things for those in most need, we do these things for him. Jesus is not here for us to feed or clothe or care for. But the needy people of the world who are alive now when we are alive, are here.

We have an opportunity now to serve those in need in Jesus' name. There are asylum seekers in Lewiston who have apartments furnished only with appliances. These strangers need everything from pots and pans to furniture and bedding, and clothing. There is someone local who will transport donations to Lewiston each day. I am hoping that we can respond generously to this need. There is a sheet of paper in the Narthex that gives further information. We will have boxes available where you can put donations for Lewiston.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus knows people's hearts. We are revealed to Jesus, for who we are and who we are becoming. What we do as followers of Jesus also reveals to others outside the church what our faith means. People outside the church are drawn to the church – and much more importantly, to Christ – when they see how church members love one another and how they do what Jesus commanded, to love others as ourselves. If we are faithful in these things, we can let God take care of the rest.

Today we celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ and remember the vision of Christ's glory given to his disciples, Peter, James, and John. Glorious, dazzling light and God's voice from heaven, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" The vision and God's words lead us into Lent, when we are called to listen to Jesus and to walk deliberately with him, according to God's ways of justice, mercy, and love, whatever the cost. We journey through this life with faith that we are headed for a closer relationship with God, to everlasting life in which we will have the joy of knowing and loving God more fully than we do now. In Jesus' name. Amen.