

## The Strivin's More Important than the Goal

Ex. 34: 29-35

Luke 9: 28-36

Transfiguration Sunday Feb. 7, 2016

as I disappear into my music,  
and the song grows deep inside my soul.  
I know if God wants me to use it,  
the strivin's more important than the goal, and I think ...

I sat at Cabaret last weekend and was struck more than once at how much these kids grow and change and mature over the four years they are in high school. The final spotlight happened to be a neighbor boy who is now a senior. He started high school very shy. He surprised his mom by auditioning for a spotlight his freshman year. He did a great job singing and he did a fine job with a country song. You also couldn't look at him without internalizing a little of the terror in his eyes. He came out in a flannel shirt and cowboy boots, which matched his song. His feet were cemented to the floor and he stood there like the frozen chosen. His face was beet red with sweat on his brow and if you looked closely I am pretty sure the mic was shaking. Fast forward to last weekend. He is now a senior and was given the closing spotlight. He did a solo to Mack the Knife with a full band. He was dressed Buble style in a purple suit with a bowler hat, he moved all over the place and generally owned the stage. The transformation was nothing less than miraculous and he glowed, almost like I pictured Moses and Elijah on top of the mountain.

Both of today's passages are very visual. Mountains, veils, low hanging clouds, illuminated faces and bodies. Stone tablets and tents. The gospel passage is the visual reality of another verse. Matthew 17: 17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. So here we have Moses representing the law, Elijah the prophets, and then the Christ as the fulfillment of both.

As we finish up with epiphany, mindful of the many ways God is manifested in our lives and in the life of the world at hand. We pause for a mountaintop, other-worldly experience. Like the disciples we all have a yearning for meaning, to have an imminent moment with the transcendent God.

I see a transfiguration and a transformation a little differently but it may be a technicality. A transformation is usually seen as an end result, or an outcome. In reality the image of my neighbor boy is a good example of how a transformation is not only a process going on at once on many levels. It's also true that this transformed boy is a mere 18 years old getting ready to graduate from high school. Most of us here can attest that is considered more of a beginning or a stepping off point, than an outcome. This kid will go through many more transformations and if I saw him 4 years from now let alone 20, I may not even recognize him.

When I think of transfiguration I think of something like a pregnancy. The body changes, people often experience pregnant women having a glow about them. I had more of a gray, ashy sickly look, but that is just a personal thing. It's also a temporary condition. There is no doubt most bodies are transformed and do not return to the exact way they were before. Some women sure look darn close. The point I guess is that we could look at

it either way. Both are true. We are permanently changed, we still look mostly the same, yet we have taken a different shape.

Something else jumped out at me as the choirs got together at the end of the night and sang their traditional song "What Would I do Without my Music" If we broaden the word "music" to mean whatever makes our souls sing, the essence of ourselves that we are meant to share uniquely with the world, then listen to this lyric "As I disappear into my music, and the song grows deep inside my soul. I know if God wants me to use it, the striving's more important than the goal." The striving is the journey, and especially during Lent the process is the goal, the journey is the focus. If we get stuck on the outcome of deep thoughts and magical mystical encounters, we are showing our human nature just like the disciples. There is no shame in that, but it will be a barrier to our understanding of the word. Unlike Moses in Exodus who received ten commandments, in Luke there is only one, "Listen, this is my chosen one, listen to what Christ is telling you." It's very hard to listen when we are busy trying to do something or make something happen. This is quite upside down, which goes with our theme for Lent.

Martin Luther King said that darkness has never driven out darkness, only light can do that. Hate has never driven out hate, only love can do that. Wouldn't it make sense that before we start the journey of Lent we would clothe ourselves in light and love as a reminder of where we belong, where we come from and our final destination. This passage points to the reality of resurrection as well. If we are going to confront the darkness in ourselves we had best remember we have nothing to fear. In darkness we may not see the light but it is always there. As the ashes are rubbed on our foreheads we are reminded of the triumph of Palm Sunday even though the palms have been transformed by fire and look

and feel differently. 10 months ago the essence of those same ashes were carried down the aisle in triumph preparing for the final leg of Jesus' departure. This week they symbolize the start of a different journey even as they used to symbolize the end of another.

The destination is also light, the reality of resurrection is clearly pointed to in the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus discussing his departure. Just as the disciples followed Jesus back down the mountain, resurrection does not mean freedom from the world but freedom for the world. It's just a day in the life of teaching, healing, turning water into wine. We live in a world of suffering and death, we see it everytime we look at the latest news. Victory over death means that life can take a different shape. UCC pastor Katherine Matthews shares two stories of brilliant light she is reminded of on

Transfiguration Sunday:

I'm reminded of two stories about a brilliant light that I read long ago: The first one is from the conclusion of *War and Remembrance*, Herman Wouk's fine novel on World War II (*note: spoiler alert*). At the end of a long story of indescribable suffering and loss, a young mother, Natalie, is reunited with her child, Louis, after their terrible ordeal in a concentration camp. When the child who has refused to speak slowly begins to sing along with his mother's lullaby, the two men watching the mother-and-child reunion "each put a hand over his eyes, as though dazzled by an unbearable sudden light."

The second story was told by a surgeon about a young couple, after the doctor had to perform a disfiguring surgery on the wife's face so that she could live. As a result of the

surgery, the young woman would never be able to smile on one side of her face again.

The surgeon felt very bad about this, and watched with a heavy heart as the husband went into his wife's room and saw her for the first time, a line drawing her mouth down on one side. "I think it's kind of cute," he said, "your crooked little smile." The doctor said that he had to look away from these two young people, as if the light were too bright for him to bear.

These stories connect me with the almost inaccessible story of the Transfiguration much as the story of the boy's healing does in Luke's Gospel: those flashes of brilliant light that made those who watched a scene of transcendent, almost unbearable, beauty cover their eyes...that light is what came to my mind when I thought of Jesus all glorious and full of light, up there on the mountaintop with his disciples. Those who spend time in the presence of the Lord will reflect God's glory. It's impossible for this to feel like showing off in anyway. Reflecting God's glory is about being right with God, unveiled and free to speak the truth without fear.

At the end of this passage Jesus heals a boy with just a few words. So as we are listening and at every step of the journey may we be affected like the crowd was in the story. The very last sentence says "And all were astounded at the greatness of God." What a great place to be, astounded at the greatness of God. And all the people said Amen.