

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

February 27, 2022

Transfiguration

PRELUDE “*Dona Nobis Pacem*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

The glory of God transfigures the everyday!

The light of God transfigures familiar faces!

At the heights of our worship, may God’s presence shine through the commonplace.

At the depths of our pain and struggle, may God’s presence give us courage and peace.

All: **May God’s light, shining in the face of Christ, illumine all our days! Amen.**

(Ruth C. Duck, *Touch Holiness*)

HYMN No. 25 “*Immortal, Invisible*”

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious – Thy great name we praise.

To all, life Thou givest – to both great and small,
In all life Thou livest – the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish – but naught changeth Thee.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

Mighty God, stay with us always, not only in our worship, but as we share the risk and challenge of living our faith. By your powerful Spirit, turn our fear to courage. Your glory shines in the face of Christ; shine in our hearts and lives. May your name be praised, glorious God! Amen.

(Ruth C. Duck, *Touch Holiness*)

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 9:28 - 43a

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring

your son here.” While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

SERMON

Carrie Newcomer is a singer/songwriter that I had the privilege of meeting – both her and her music – a few years ago when I attended a seminar in Chicago; since then, I’ve followed her on Facebook, bought a few CDs and generally grown to deeply appreciate her, her music and her wisdom. This past week, she told a story about one of those unplanned airport layovers most of us have come to know and despise. She sang a concert in Sioux Falls, but her flight out of there was delayed several hours, so of course, she missed her connection in Chicago. Which handed her a 4-hour layover in O’Hare Airport. She said she found a comfortable booth in a busy Starbucks and settled in with a book. But I don’t think she got much reading done. She reports that there were three baristas working the counter, one of whom was a young African American man with a wide smile. He was singing mini arias in a beautiful operatic voice. Obviously a trained vocalist and a seriously fine baritone. One after another, he sang out the orders in soaring melodies as they came up, lattes and cappuccinos, the name of the patrons, and then always (with a final flourish) a generous thank you . She says, she sat there for an hour, just listening to him, closing her eyes, enjoying the resonance of his voice, the flourishes, the final gratitudes. As she watched him, she also watched what was happening around her. Some people stopped, clearly delighted by something so fine and rarefied. Others hurried by, so intent on getting where they were going that they arrived at their gate but missed the miracle. She writes, “There is a lot in this troubled world that feels like a gathering storm. But then something utterly unexpected and truly beautiful happens. There is a goodness down deep....that just keeps singing.”

I’m not sure what you’d call a miracle like that, if you were one of the attentive ones who happened to take it in and let it wash over you. I think about the unplanned overnight I spent at O’Hare after the very conference where I met Carrie, and I know that if that barista had been serenading me during the long hours I waited in line to talk with a ticket agent, I would have had a very different night than I did. The miracle of his music could have transformed at least that endless night, and maybe even rearranged a bunch of attitudes and annoyances that have been accumulating inside me for awhile now. Hard to tell, but I think it’s possible.

If a singing barista at an O’Hare Starbucks is capable of serving up a miracle of beauty and goodness to world weary travelers, can you even begin to imagine what a sighting of the glory of God can do to three baffled and bewildered disciples? Transformation doesn’t even begin to describe it.

Peter, James and John had been on the road with Jesus for awhile. They’d signed on without a lot of clarity about what they were getting themselves into, but when he filled their boats to overflowing with fish, he also tapped into something deep within each of them, so they joined up and headed out. Since then, they’d witnessed miracles and caught glimpses of wonder as scores of bruised and broken people crowded in, were lifted up and set on their feet. He’d even sent them out to play a part in his work of healing, equipping them with what they needed to heal and bless, teach and embrace. Just eight days ago, he’d pulled the whole circle of disciples together and asked what they’d figured out about who he is and what he’s up to. Peter stepped up with the prize winning answer, You are the Messiah we’ve been waiting for; but the bells hadn’t even stopped celebrating the win before Jesus rushed on to talk about suffering, rejection and death, and invited them to deny themselves, pick up a cross and follow him along. They’d been chewing on that for 8 days now, and it didn’t really matter how they put the pieces together; they just couldn’t make them fit together.

Finally, they got up one morning, and Jesus tagged Peter, James and John to come with him up a mountain to pray. It was a good hike and a great day, but long and tiring. The 3 did some of their own

praying, and when they were done with that, they concentrated on trying to stay awake. All the while, Jesus prayed. The look of his face changed, his clothes became dazzling white, and the next thing they knew, he was talking with Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest and most important of the prophets of their people; the three of them were talking about what lay ahead for Jesus, including his exodus and what was coming in Jerusalem.

The three disciples worked hard to rub the sleep from their eyes and pull it together, but this was more than they could make sense of. Not having the faintest clue what to do in the face of such glory and mystery, but liking it a whole heap better than talk of suffering and death, or even of an exodus (remember the plagues and the Red Sea, the manna and quail, and the forty years of wilderness wanderings?), Peter decided this was a moment worth capturing and extending – for as long as possible. So he volunteered to set up three booths, one for each of Jesus and his friends. Let's cherish this moment and stretch it out. Which is when a cloud swept in and swallowed them up, and a voice spoke from the midst of the cloud: This is my Son, my chosen, listen to him. Then, the cloud was gone as fast as it came; Moses and Elijah too. Leaving Jesus alone, and the three friends standing looking at each other, more than a little shell shocked and bewildered about what in the world had just happened.

It's tempting to think that the experience of God's glory ended when the cloud lifted, and Moses and Elijah disappeared. That as Peter sulked his way back down the mountain, he was struggling to let go of the glory and leave it up there on top of the mountain, so they could get back to work in the real world, and the endless stream of suffering and sorrow that was undoubtedly waiting for them. And right on cue: they did return to a desperate father and a tormented son. And a group of disciples who were powerless to do anything to help or heal the son. Now, I'm not clear who couldn't heal him, the nine who'd been hanging out waiting for Jesus and the inner circle to return or Peter, James and John, still so befuddled by what they'd seen and walked away from that they didn't know which end was up; but between them, the disciples were useless and Jesus was not favorably impressed. He reprimanded the disciples, rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy and returned him to his father. It may not be clouds, ancient prophets and the voice of God, but it sounds to me like the glory of God was still very much alive and well and at work in their midst.

Debie Thomas puts it this way: "... God is just as present, active, engaged, and glorious down in the valley as God is in the visions of saints, clouds, and shadows Peter experiences in the high places. In fact, what Peter eventually learns is that the compassionate heart of God is most powerfully revealed amidst the broken, the sinful, the suffering, and the despairing. The kingdom of God shines most brightly against the backdrop of the parent who grieves, the child who cries, the "demons" who oppress, and the disciples who try but fail to manufacture the holy. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. God's beauty is best contained in broken vessels. We might not like this aspect of faith, but it's an aspect that has much to teach us." ("Down from the Mountain", *Journey with Jesus*, posted 20 February 2022)

I don't know this for a fact, but I'm guessing that few, if any of us, have had a mountain top experience of a transfigured Jesus dressed in shimmering white clothes, a visitation from ancient prophets, and the voice of God speaking from within a cloud. I've experienced the all engulfing cloud on top of a mountain, but it wasn't an experience of glory or grace. Mountain top or not, I'm not willing to concede that we haven't experienced glory. More than likely, it's been down and around us, often dusty and broken, bleeding and bruised. The grief of a parent, the cry of a child, the destruction of a tornado, the aftermath of a wildfire, the air raid sirens of a bombing raid begun. God's glory is present in the midst of all of that and so much more. In the compassion of doctors, the comfort of companions, the protests of those who say no to war, the courage of those who hold the line, the kindness of a stranger who offers a cup of cold water. The glory of God is among us, waiting to be recognized and celebrated, inviting us to help it become visible to others.

Carrie Newcomer observed that some of her fellow travelers at O'Hare witnessed the miracle of music in a crowded Starbucks, while others rushed wearily by focused on finding their gate. She watched and enjoyed – and then she decided to participate in the wonder of it all. She said that she eventually got in line at the counter. When the barista asked for her order, she smiled and sang, "I'll have a grande latte, with almond milk please." The young woman grinned and the baritone turned to look at her. And then they began a completely sung conversation. His name is Owen, he's a student and would be singing in an opera next Saturday. Her name's Carrie, she's just had a show in Sioux Falls and is heading home. He's from Chicago. She lives in Bloomington. He plays piano, but his main instrument is his voice. She plays guitar and writes her own songs. This went on for awhile, the two other baristas standing back, nodding at one another. Finally, she sang an affirmation, "You have a truly beautiful voice. I have been so moved today by your incredibly generous spirit." And with a bow, she sang a heart felt "Thank you, my friend". He stopped, and with eyes shining and full, he leaned over the counter and whispered, "I needed that today." Then he straightened up, lifted his head and in his glorious baritone voice sang "Grande Latte with Almond Milk, my friend" and ended with a flourished "Thank you" that was as elegant as an old time signature written with a quill tipped pen. (Facebook)

The glory of God is among us, waiting to be seen and recognized, shared and spread. The voice of God speaks, and calls to us to listen. The compassionate heart of God is present and pulsing, weeping in the streets of Kyiv, rejoicing with the discharge of each Covid patient, angry in the face of injustice, dancing as new life is born and hearts expand in love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN No. 381 *"Open My Eyes, That I May See"*

Open my eyes, that I may see Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key, That shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
And while the wave-notes fall on my ear, Everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let it bear Gladly the warm truth everywhere;
Open my heart, and let me prepare Love with Thy children thus to share.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

PRAYER REQUESTS

PASTORAL PRAYER

Open our eyes, Holy God, to see and recognize glimpses of your glory shining all around us: in the sparkle of fresh snow, the singing of a barista, the gentleness of a doctor, the welcome of a stranger. May we know you in a touch that brings healing, a kindness that offers hope, a mercy that promises a new beginning, a whisper that speaks peace. It's so easy to be overwhelmed and distracted by what we have failed to do and where we need to be next, how others have wronged us and the fears that hold us captive. Even there, open our eyes to recognize you among us, our ears to receive your call, our mouths to speak your compassion, and our hearts to cradle your love.

We pray, Holy One, for our community and our country. Grateful that Covid numbers continue to recede, we ask you to guide and bless us in the days, weeks and months that lie ahead, that the choices we make be wise and thoughtful ones, not simply the abandon of those who have had enough. Guide us in protecting the vulnerable, caring for the caregivers, and walking in ways that will lead to health and

wholeness for all. We pray for those once again in the path of severe storms, for those whose worlds have been rocked by violence, and for those struggling with rising prices and what seems the impossibility of caring for their loved ones. Show us the way forward, Holy God, that we might receive your healing and holding, and that by your grace, we might reach to one another in kindness and compassion, working together and with you to fashion a world graced by your glory.

We pray as well for our world and its brokenness, especially for all those facing into the nightmare reality of war in Ukraine. We pray for people fleeing their homes, picking through the rubble of what used to be, looking for signs of life, seeking shelter in subway stations or on the other side of their country's border. For the stability of the Chernobyl Nuclear plant. We give you thanks for the leadership and courage of President Zelenskyy, and pray for his safety and protection. For those who serve and fight, protest and pray; for the people of Russia who dare to join in protesting a war that makes no sense and threatens great harm. For world leaders who work together to protect innocent life and strengthen the vulnerable. Be with each of them and all of us. Grant us wisdom and courage, hope and strength, a vision of the things that make for peace and of the role we can play to help bring that dream to life. Lead us, Holy God; help us to be your faithful people, and to walk in the paths you set before us.

Hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken. And hear us as we join together in the prayer that Jesus taught, saying: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (depts)

OFFERING

God has richly blessed us, and asks us to be a blessing to others – through the sharing of our gifts, the living of our lives, the offering of our love. Let us give freely and love generously, trusting God to bless our lives and multiply our gifts, that through them, the church might be strengthened and God's love made visible. Let us pray:

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

Most giving and forgiving God, you provide for our every need. You open our lips to offer you praise. You strengthen our hands to respond to Christ's call. With hearts, hands and voices renewed by your Spirit, we place now before you our commitment to serve. Use us in ways that will benefit others, and accept what we offer as a sign of our faith. Amen. (Chalice Worship)

HYMN No. 292 "God of Grace and God of Glory"

God of grace and God of glory, On Thy people pour Thy power;
Crown Thine ancient Church's story, Bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, For the facing of this hour, For the facing of this hour.

Lo! the hosts of evil round us Scorn Thy Christ, assail His ways!
From the fears that long have bound us, Free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, For the living of these days, For the living of these days.

BENEDICTION

The world is now too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.
May your eyes be so blessed that you see God in everyone.
Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor.
May your hands be so blessed that everything you touch is a sacrament.
Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.
May your feet be so blessed that you run to those who need you.
And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire, that your love, *your love* changes everything.