

“Spread Love”

II Kings 2:1-12, II Corinthians 4:3-6, Mark 9:2-9

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From the Pulpit

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A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Transfiguration Sunday, February 14, 2021, also Valentine's Day 2021, in the love of God, this sermon is dedicated to Grace Glaros on her 13th birthday, to all the men and women who defended our US Capitol to save our Republic on January 6, 2021 against a domestic terrorist insurrection, to all the people who have joined us on YouTube and Facebook Live for the past 49 Sundays and always to the Glory of God!

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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The Transfiguration of Jesus is a unique metamorphosis from Human to Divine Light back to Human. This story is unique in all of Holy Scripture. After preaching for the first time about his suffering and death in Mark's Gospel, Jesus climbs onto a high and holy mountain along with Peter, James, John. There on the mountaintop, before the disciples' eyes, Jesus is changed.

He becomes radiant. He is glorious in this transformation embraced by God's pure light! His garments become whiter than

white right in front of them. In the midst of his transfiguration two other transformational figures appear – Elijah, the first and greatest prophet of the Hebrew people and Moses, the law-giver and deliverer of Israel. The three transfigured ones Moses, Elijah and Jesus stand in the presence of the three human ones – Peter, James and John.

The disciples are blown away – which only intensifies when a mysterious cloud overshadows them and a voice comes from the cloud saying, **“This is my beloved Son, Listen to Him!”**

Then it ends. There on the mountain, Peter, James, and John are once again alone with Jesus, their teacher and friend. Everything seemingly returns to normal, yet nothing is ever the same again. There is now a **“NEW NORMAL”** that changes everything for everyone.

Behind them are memories of the beautiful days of teaching and healing by the seaside of Galilee, before they stand in the valley of the shadow of death which guides them to the challenging days of religious confrontation and cross-bearing hillsides outside the city gates of the metropolis – Jerusalem.

But not to lose this moment - here on a mountaintop in a moment of time that they can't reclaim by building little shrines to commemorate the moment, their man Jesus shines as the Messiah Christ. The carpenter of Nazareth is revealed as **“Son of God,”** **“Christ of Glory,”** and perhaps most important, **THE** one to whom all should **Listen!** And his first words he tells them to listen to is **“don't tell anyone anything.”**

And the question begs itself, **“Does it take a moment like this for disciples to really listen to their Master and Teacher?”** Do you and I need this transfiguration to really take Jesus seriously? DO we need him turned into pure light **to listen and follow** what he teaches and how he heals and how he leads us by laying down his life for us?

Listen to this. Throughout Epiphany, the Jesus of Nazareth whom we have begun to know in Mark’s Gospel, for all his miraculous powers, is intensely human. He feels pity and anger, hunger and weariness. But, here in the transfiguration, he shows no emotion, takes no action, and on the mountaintop of glory – he speaks no words. Rather he appears in glory as an almost passive object of a metamorphosis that reveals his inner nature to his innermost circle of disciples. Here is pure transcendence, of a sort not found elsewhere in Mark’s gospel or any of the four gospels. (Reference, Mark, Lamar Williamson, Jr., John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1983, pp.157-158.)

Listen to this. The holiness of the Messiah shines through the humanness of the man – with a face so afire that it almost blinds Peter, James, and John.

What are we to make of Elijah and Moses beside him? In the transfiguration of Jesus, we are united with two expectations which were and are alive and vibrant in Judaism: First, the fulfillment of God’s law which is embodied by Moses and second, the return of God’s Ultimate prophet embodied by Elijah. On the mountain, the presence of the law and the prophets come together to consummate – in Jesus – the dreams of the past and hopes for the

future. Elijah and Moses stand united, shoulder-to-shoulder with Jesus as a presence declaring, **“Go on!”** You are on the right path! **Go on** – fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. **Keep Going!**

And what are we to make of the disciples on the mountaintop? God reveals to them visions of past glory and a window through which they glimpse future glory. Despite this glorious transformation of Jesus, we know that the future, like the past is not the proper dwelling place of the church or discipleship.

We dwell in the present moment. It is the present day which defines and clarifies God’s call for us. This day. This moment. This time defines us. And we learn from this story that when we glimpse Glory, we cannot simply build shrines to it or live with a monument mentality. Rather, God calls us – like the disciples – down from our mountaintop experiences to the valleys of need and to a present moment and reality which beckons us to use God’s shine for others, not to try to bottle it for its resale value. God transcends through Jesus so that we might be agents of transformation with him here and now.

We are called from the mountaintop to the valley to Spread Love!

This was told in a story of Mother Teresa from years ago. She encountered a man from Melbourne and tells this story:

In Melbourne, I paid a visit to an old man no one knew existed. I saw that his room was in horrible condition and I wanted to clean it up but he stopped me: “I’m all right.” I kept quiet, and finally he let me go ahead. In his room was a beautiful lamp covered with dust and I asked “Why don’t you light the lamp?” He replied: “For what? Nobody comes to see me and I don’t need a lamp.” Then I said to him, “Will you light the lamp if the Sisters come to see you?”

“Yes,” he said, “if I hear a human voice, I will light it.” The other day he sent me word, “Tell my friend that the lamp she lit in my life burns constantly.” (The Love of Christ, Harper and Row: San Francisco, 1982 Pp. 31-32.)

If I hear a human voice, I will light the lamp . . . How many times has God’s light brilliantly broken forth in your life because someone has simply taken the time to be God transfigured -- light shining for you?! How many of us have had a lamp lit in our life that burns constantly? Someone has been for us a light in the darkness and changed us?

On this day, Valentine’s Day 2008, one of God’s light beams entered this world and shined into my life and changed me.

Her name is **Grace Kirsten Glaros**.

Grace was born at St. Anne’s Hospital to Lauren and Chris Glaros – and older brother Lincoln. Grace was born with spina bifida – a medical condition that presents a lifetime of medical challenges. Shortly after her birth, I baptized Grace not knowing if she would make it through her first day. Shortly after, she was life-flighted to Children’s Hospital for her first surgery. Since her birth 13 years ago today, Grace has gone through 39 surgeries. Through it all, she has spread love.

Chris posted this on Facebook May 4, 2017 as political leaders in Washington, DC were chopping health care coverage for millions of Americans. He spoke of his love for his daughter and his deep concern about the effects of health care cuts on so many children and families.

I share a part of his post related to Grace who was nine at the time:

At a 20-week ultrasound (in 2007), we learned that our baby would be born with spina bifida and face a lifetime of enormous health challenges. After hearing this news, the first thing I could think to do when we got home was read my Bible.

I randomly opened up the scriptures to see what would speak to me. And it was John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

I love to sing Amazing Grace to my daughter at bedtime. Tonight, I prayed for our elected officials while singing:

*"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see."*

Lord, I think they know not what they do. Restore their sight for what is right."

"Amazing Grace" has inspired all of us for 13 years. From her wheelchair with lights in the front wheels, she leads us and inspires us. You know her for her acting in the Children's plays, her singing in the choir, her acolyte service at 11am on Sundays and her beautiful smile and utmost joy. Some of you have seen Grace sing and dance with her dance group. She also loves the piano on which she takes weekly lessons. I can't wait to teach her in Confirmation next year!

In speaking with Chris and Lauren this week, I listened to them talk about their daughter who needs 24/7 care and who had just had a Zoom baking birthday party with her eight close friends who were all making cookies and brownies together (at least 28 sticks of butter in 9 different kitchens)! They said:

“Grace is resilient. She is so loving and reflects the goodness in people. She teaches us each day to never take any day for granted. Grace brings perspective to our lives as she needs 24/7 care. We take nothing for granted because she takes nothing for granted. ‘Another good day’ is a gift. None of it is promised to any of us. She brings perspective to our lives to live this day with joy, to live life this day.”

Lauren continued talking about the day Grace was born:

“The day she was born she came out screaming and crying. She kicked her legs and all of that made me really, really happy. We had no idea that she would be able to move her legs. It was as joyous a day for me as the day our son Lincoln was born.”

Everything Grace does is harder than it is for you and me. But she ignores the challenges and powers through every day. However, it is her spirit and heart that I most admire today.

Grace appreciates the little things of life. For example, Chris told me she woke the other day and she couldn't stop thinking about me baptizing her with water from the River Jordan where Jesus was baptized. She smiled and said to Chris, ***“how cool is that!?”***

Grace is very forgiving of others. She is thankful all the time for everything everyone does for her. Her enduring through suffering and her true and amazing Grace has brought her closer to God

and those around her as well. Grace lives fully in the present. Grace shines God's light. Grace spreads love.

All of us need to live in the glow and the glory of the present moment. All of us are called to shine God's light and love. We need to embrace the transfiguring moments of life in which the mystery of God's light and love are present.

See the glowing face of a father carrying his newborn child around hospital hallways introducing the babe to everyone in the path or a mother holding her daughter to chest leaving court with her newly adopted child of joy!

See a woman shoveling sidewalks for her elderly neighbor and dropping off cookies in a snowstorm at the door of a new neighbor.

See the closed eyes and piercing smile and moving head of a hopeful young artist listening to a symphony of sound in an orchestra hall, or moving his fingers across the strings of his cello bringing beauty into the space of worship. See another young artist with her eyes and mouth open, wide standing head back, and eyes up adoring art hung high on museum walls.

See a young girl facing a vast ocean in awe of waves that echo and hit too far out to hurt but still cause her to scamper with glee toward the safety of sand dunes. See a boy sliding home and laying in a cloud of baseball dirt with the winning run on a Saturday afternoon in July as teammates storm the plate and arms are flailing and feet are lifting joy airborne.

DO you see how often we are touched by experiences so incandescent, so alive, so mysterious that we are changed – that light

is shining in ways that transfigure the human face with such beauty that it is almost beyond bearing?

This is God's Love alive in this world. And we glimpse the face of God in a human voice, in a magnificent landscape, in a moment of pure joy and we know that we have witnessed once again, in a small but beautiful way the transfiguration of our Christ and our God.

Today, remember the Man in Melbourne and if you hear a human voice, light a lamp. Remember Grace in Columbus and live each moment and each day with love and grace. Remember Jesus on the mountaintop of transfiguration and spread love from the mountaintops of glory to the valleys of need. Alleluia! Amen.