

# *“A Face Like the Sun”*

*Transfiguration Sunday*

*Exodus 24:12-18; II Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9*

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From the Pulpit

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A baptismal meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Transfiguration Sunday, February 26, 2017 dedicated to Walter Robert Gapinski who was baptized on Saturday and to Beau Hudson Kirker, baptized today and always to the glory of God!

***“A Face Like the Sun”***

***Exodus 24:12-18; II Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9***

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*Today is our last Sunday of Epiphany - a season of revelation, light, awakenings and the recognition of the “ah-ahs!” of life. It is also a season of God’s power becoming manifest in Christ Jesus. It always arrives on January 6 - 12 night of Christmas - with the wise men in the stable bearing gifts for the newborn king, and it ends with the Transfiguration of Jesus on a high and holy mountain. Next comes Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent – only 72 hours away.*

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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.*

Have you ever climbed into the clouds on a high and holy mountain and been changed? Have you had spiritual experiences in your life that have lit you up from inside to outside? The spirit of God within you glowing – your face alive with God’s light shining in you and through you to others? More simply, have you ever found yourself “changed” by an experience in which you were ready to receive God’s spirit and it came to you powerfully and beautifully? If you have had epiphanies like this – or transformational spiritual experiences in other ways and places, then today’s scripture lessons resonate within you. If you have not felt such movements of God’s Spirit, please listen and learn – and be open to such a moment in your life.

Exodus and Matthew tell us that Moses and Jesus God’s two greatest prophets in Old and New Testament, in two different times on two different mountains in two different ways encounter the revelation of our One Holy God.

In Exodus, Moses steps into The Cloud which covered Mt. Sinai. For six days, the glory of God settled on Sinai. On the mountaintop, Moses receives the Word of God for the people of the Hebrews. What appeared to be a raging fire to the people below the mountaintop was no less than the Glory

of God! Through the Glory of God, in The Cloud, on the Mountain, the Lord revealed all the commandments, the rubrics of religion, and the faithful teachings Moses would need to lead the people of the Hebrews to the promised land and begin the reign of God in the land of Palestine.

Jewish midrash says of the Revelation of God's Torah (God's Word): “The Torah was given in fire (Exodus 19:18) And Mt. Sinai was wrapped in smoke . . . The Torah was given in water (Judges 5:4) and there upon the mountain, the clouds dropped water . . . The Torah was given in wilderness (Numbers 1:1), And the Eternal One spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai . . . Why? These three (Fire, Water, Wilderness) are a gift to all who live, and the Torah is a gift, as it is said (Isaiah 55:1), *“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and the one who has no money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost!”* (Rabbi Chaim Stern, Day-by-Day, p. 116).

No less than “**Fire, water, and wilderness**” were what Moses was charged by God to reveal. Communicating God's Glory from mountaintop to valley is unenviable task. Mark Twain was later to synthesize the Word of God in these two sentences: *“Always do right. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”* If only Mark Twain and not Joshua had accompanied Moses, perhaps things would have come out

differently when they returned from the mountaintop to the valley.

Peter tells us of the second revelation on the mountaintop in his second letter: “You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (II Peter 1:19b). You see, the second revelation was not textual but spiritual. It was not about words on tablets but about The Word of God Becoming Flesh and dwelling among us. The second revelation on the mountaintop was the transformation of prophet and teacher into the Pure Light of God! Jesus’ face shined like the sun so that God’s love, life and light would rise in our hearts like the morning star.

Matthew fills in Peter’s story as he tells us that on the Mount of Transfiguration - another high and holy mountain - Peter, James, John, and Jesus were all changed. In a moment, in a flash of light, Jesus was transfigured - changed from the inside out, right before the eyes of the disciples. As he was changed from the inside out, they were changed from the inside out as well. Sunlight poured from Jesus’ face. His clothes were filled with light. There on that mountaintop, completely enveloped by The Cloud of Knowing, Moses and Elijah came down upon the mountain to enter into deep conversation with Jesus. I wonder what they talked about –

these three chosen ones of God? Without a doubt, they talked about more than the weather. Because each was committed to the transformation of the human soul, I am sure there was some mention of God being with us. Moses and Elijah must have encouraged the young son of God to be strong as he moved from mountaintop to valley; from the clouds to the crowds.

As the three prophets were kibitzing on the mountain, Peter felt it would be a good idea to build a shrine there by which to remember this moment. In the midst of Peter's babble, God spoke. From the all-embracing Cloud, God said, **"This is my Son, marked by my love, focus on my delight. Listen to him."** There would be no more talk of huts, God had spoken. Men were silent! Terrified by the overwhelming presence of God, Jesus calmed them, lifted them to their feet, guided them down the mountain and swore them to secrecy until the day he rose from the dead.

Two texts, two mountains, two prophets, two revelations, One Holy and Mysterious God. I have said before (and I will say again) that I love these texts because they hold in tension that "thin place" between heaven and earth. God's calling to each of us is that experience the thin space of holy revelation in our lives!

Earlier I asked if you had ever climbed the mountain and seen the light of God there. But, transformation and transfiguration in our spiritual lives happen all over the place. While some of us experience God's bridging heaven and earth on high and holy mountains, others of us discover God in the valleys below. Some of us by the ocean side. Some by the lakeside. Some in gardens. Some in forest green. Some in the still small voice of God revealed in prayer. Some, here in this holy place. Some in science. Some in art and poetry. Some in languages – ancient and true. Some in the rocking and the lullabies of babies in arms. Some in the breaking of bread and the communion of the saints. Some in the pouring of baptismal water and the unity of the Holy Spirit. Some in the Torah. Some in the Cross. Some in prayer and the solitude and silence of the human heart.

Albert Einstein once wrote: *“The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. One who knows it not, who can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle.”* (Ibid, p.45).

The mystery of God and God's revelation in Word (to Moses on the mountain) and in Flesh (as the transfigured Christ on the mountain) is a constant reminder and call to

each us to be open to God's amazing grace and presence in our daily lives.

Morris West reminds us that this is not always (if ever) a harmonious experience, but it is always “of God.” West writes, “*Wherever I turn . . . I am confronted with mystery. I believe in the Godly harmony which is the result of the eternal creative act . . . But, I do not always hear the harmony. I must wrestle with the cacophony and apparent discord of the score, knowing that I shall not hear the grand resolution until the day I die and, hopefully, am united with God . . .*” (Ibid., p. 48).

On two high and holy mountains, in two times, in two places, with two prophets, One Light from One Cloud of Knowing as One God revealed truth in the Written Word and then, in the Incarnate Word. In the thin spaces of your life, may God reveal the Risen Christ to you. Feel free to share his transformative and transfigurative Good News with those around you.

In the mystery and majesty of thin spaces, may we join our hearts and voices to praise God in the words of the great hymn: “*Immortal, Invisible, God only wise, In Light, Inaccessible, hid from our eyes, all blessed, all glorious, the ancient of days, almighty, victorious, thy Great Name We Praise.*” Amen.

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