

# “Two Shining Moments”

Exodus 34:29-35; II Corinthians 3:14-4:2; Luke 9:28-36

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*February 7, 2016*

From the Pulpit

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A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio. February 7, 2016, Transfiguration Sunday, dedicated to my friend Van V. Barndt, to Van's beloved sister Kathy and BROTHER Tom Brownfield, to my parents, Herman and Lorene Ahrens and my mother-in-law, Ruth Sitler and always to the glory of God!

*“Two Shining Moments”*

*Exodus 34:29-35; II Corinthians 3:14-4:2; Luke 9:28-36*

*“Moses didn't know that the skin of his face glowed because he had been speaking with GOD.” – Exodus 34:30*

*“While he was in prayer, the appearance of Jesus face changed and his clothes became blinding white.”- Luke 9:29*

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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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Who among us is fully capable of stepping into the clouds surrounding Mt. Sinai or the Mt. of Transfiguration

(Mt. Horeb) and able and ready to explain the changes that took place on those mountaintops so long ago?

Who among us can explain how a man like Moses, coupled with God on a mountaintop, fasting, praying, and present for 40 days and 40 nights without eating bread or drinking water was changed forever – physically, emotionally, and spiritually?

Likewise, who among us is bold enough to answer for Jesus who goes up the mountain by the Sea of Galilee to pray? The Clouds of God completely surround him, the presence of Moses and Elijah (The Lawgiver and Great Mysterious and Disappeared Prophet) align with him, and he is changed in his face and his clothing. His entire appearance changes right before his three top disciples - Peter, James and John. And when this transformational change happens, the voice of God says clearly enough for ALL to hear, *“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”* Which one of us is able to explain this? Who among us can fully translate “transfiguration” in ways that are truly Transformational?

When Moses and Jesus themselves “are silent in the face of God’s changing them to Light Magnificent,” who are we to dwell on their looks and this event? Clearly, no dwellings shall be built to commemorate these shining moments! These are Jesus’ words – not mine.

In our struggle to name and claim transformative moments, we name a Sunday on the church calendar after this light-breaking-in-and-breaking-forth moment. To me this feels somewhat heretical and a bit bombastic, especially when we are told to be silent and say nothing about this. So, perhaps we should simply read about the changes and move on? Who do we think we are making this moment “public property” and “liturgically approved” (but not “Jesus approved”) talk about something the principle characters asked for no words about? Do you feel “the burn” or it is just me?

We end up in worshipful “hot water” trying to explain these two shining moments.” If you don’t believe me, ask Michelangelo. In the Cathedral of St. Peter in Chains in Rome sits Michelangelo’s famous statue of Moses. The most outstanding feature of this statue is not Moses clinging to the 10 commandments, or Moses’ eyes sunken and changed by having seen the face of God – but the two horns on Moses head. Most claim that the horns of Moses go back to Saint Jerome’s “translation error” in the Latin Vulgate. But, actually, in searching for words to describe Moses, the Hebrew author clearly chooses a word - found ONLY in Exodus 34 - “**qaran**” which best translates “shoots out like horns.” The writer uses “**qaran**” three times to make sure we all know that the halo on Moses’ head looks like bright

horns shooting out. Michelangelo took a lot of heat for those horns.

In the same way artists and musicians have struggled to portray Jesus changing from prophet, teacher, and healer into Pure Light. They have struggled to take his one shining moment on a mountaintop and enshrine it in such a way that we can feel better about the sting of his torture and death that come just a few weeks later. Just like “qaran” is never used again, the Greek word “**idos**” is only used only once in the New Testament. It means to “appearance, fashion, shape, sight.” It is a word that is hard to hold onto. Even the writers of these stories struggled to get words to what happened on the two mountaintops.

When words fail our Savior, the Lawgiver and the authors of our texts, on this final Sunday of Epiphany, perhaps we would do well to be silent, too. Perhaps we would do well to simply “**remember**” shining people, places and moments which go beyond words.

- People, places and moments where the artist in us wants to put horns on the Shining One because we can't explain the light beams coming from her head or his face.

- People, Places and Moments when clouds seem to surround us or perhaps something touches us that becomes clearer than has ever been before or will ever be again.

They are Moments in which our smiles are broader, we feel life and love more deeply, and we feel connected to the Divine more completely and search for words to fill out what really happened – when we should just fall on our face in silence.

All of us suffer from too much noise, too many words, **too much music, too many shrines, too many “things”** made and purchased to help us remember what we just experienced. A few days ago, as I waited to board the Southwest Airlines flight from Orlando to Columbus, I was watching all the passengers getting on the plane. I saw exhausted parents holding bags stuffed with Disney Magic. I saw boys with Goofy hats whose ears hang low and girls with Elsa and Anna “Frozen” gear looking like Angels of Winter in a Warm wonderland. And I wanted to scream (or sing) “Let it go!” We all have experienced this in some form because we know all the Magic of the days and nights were really about the amazing people with us who made the experiences amazing – not the stuff which we brought back to remind us of them. If only we could freeze these shining moments in time.

**Where and when have the shining moments of your life happened?** With whom have you been when those shining moments happened? Perhaps – like Moses – you have been alone on the mountaintop with God only.

For me, I remember so many shining moments and most all of them include my family. I remember looking out the window of our residence in Iona, Scotland and watching my children walking through the pastures with cattle and sheep. For one shining moment, I saw them as one with nature and each other. In similar ways, our family “creeking” on Memorial Day Weekends at Pilgrim Hills or fishing at Lakeside on late July evenings as the sun was going down on another perfect day at Lake Erie. If only I could bottle those shining moments or capture them in the perfect picture. But, they remain instead in the silence of my heart and mind.

Last night as the sun had set on a long day and even longer week in the home of Tom and Kathy Brownfield and Van Barndt, with family on earth and his family in heaven awaiting him, Van breathed hard as he ventured into the “thin place” between earth and heaven. Around him were gathered his three sisters, his brother-in-law Tom (to quote Van – “I like that guy!”), his nephews and nieces and grand-nephews and nieces and friends and light eternal. Susan and Sarah and I were blessed to be sharing in one shining moment for the man who has spent his life loving, laughing, singing, praying, dancing, studying God’s word and living it. Van has always loved a party and was hanging on to life as we sat beside him. At 65 years old and living his whole

life with Downs-Syndrome – a chromosome different from most of us – Van Barndt has always lived well, loved deeply, and been kind to everyone. As he laid there in the space between heaven and earth, he was hearing what we were doing but was also hearing the voices of those who await him in the next life. As we prayed and left the house, it was Transfiguration Sunday Eve. Light was surrounding our good buddy. Love and laughter was everywhere in the house – and there surrounded by love, Van was shining for God.

No picture will capture all the love, light and life which was present in the Brownfield/Barndt home last night. According to Moses and Jesus, we should not build a shrine there. But, unlike those two giants of faith who themselves were changed from light to light to light to light: that is physical light to eternal light and back to physical light and ultimately to eternal light – we are human through and through. We want to hang on to moments where God is fully present. We want to memorialize those moments. We want to have Sundays named for those moments. But, if we only silent and still – we would realize – God is making moments like this all the time in so many ways and so many places of our lives with so many people in our lives.

So, let us be still. Let us breathe – still. Let us touch and feel stillness. Let silence hold us. Words are not enough and truthfully – they are not needed – when God is in with us. And guess what – God IS with us. (long silence). Amen.

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