

A baptismal meditation delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Transfiguration Sunday, February 14, 2010, dedicated on Valentine's Day to the love of my life, Susan Elizabeth Sitrler, to my heart's delight, my children Luke, Daniel, Thalia and Sarah, to Grace Glaros on her second birthday, to Donna Lauren Vogt on her baptismal day, and always to the Glory of God!

“Shine God’s Light”

Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-36

+++++

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.

+++++

From Ohio’s bleak midwinter, we are lifted out of our current “snow globe” conditions by transcendent scriptural texts delivered from two mountaintops in a desert long ago. Both Exodus 34 and Luke 9 tell us that God sees his beloved ones and shines light and glory through their transfigured reflections to all of us.

Before ascending the mountaintops, let’s look at God’s Light.

How you and I perceive people and life around us is directly related to light shining. We see because the spectrum of light breaks open when it shines on objects. “Light reflects, refracts and absorbs in ways that allow us to discern shapes and movement. God created light first – because without light, the rest of creation would have no definition or vibrancy. We humans see only a tiny fraction of all the light that God made, yet we persist in the presumptuous notion that only what we see exists – that only a 300-nanometer piece of (light) spectrum is real.” (Adam Thomas quoted in “The Living Word,” *The Christian Century*, February 9, 2010, p.18).

Jesus blows away our presumptions when he ascends the mountain with Peter, James and John. In the moment of his transfiguration, Jesus doesn't change his form or shape or hue, but he does change the disciples' perception of his appearance. Jesus gives his disciples the gift of seeing him as God sees him – a glorious being of dazzling white light. Instead of reflecting the blues and reds and yellows of the visible spectrum, Jesus reflects the light of God. He shows himself to be luminous (Ibid). In other words, Jesus is shone by God to be the pure shining light of God that he truly is.

When Jesus opens the eyes of the disciples wider than ever before, they perceive two other people, Moses and Elijah. Elijah is the great mystical prophet who battled the false prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and later disappears in a chariot of fire. It is Elijah who is expected as a guest at each Passover Seder. Ever since his being carried into heaven so long ago, a seat is open for him at every Passover celebration as Jews anticipate his return in glory. He is God's pure light.

Moses, the strong deliverer of freedom and the law, comes down from the mountaintop with the tablets of the law. Having spoken with God and received the law, his skin is shining God's pure light. Aaron and the Israelites are afraid to come near him because of his dazzling appearance.

We wrongly assume Moses saw the face of God, but this is not true. Exodus 33:23 records God's words to Moses, "*You shall see my back, but my face shall never be seen.*" So Moses isn't shining because he saw God on the mountaintop. Moses is shining because God saw him. (Ibid)

Elijah, Moses and Jesus all show us that God sees us. God sees us not through our limited visual spectrum, but through the shimmering expanse of God's glorious spectrum. We may be visible to one another simply because we reflect and absorb great quantities of white light, but God created each one of us to do much more. God

created us to shine. (Ibid)

Almost all of us are drawn to babies. As I carried Donna past all of you today, and as you beheld her in my arms, you were seeing God's light shining in her so brightly. As a result, God's light was shining in all of your eyes. You can't miss this!

Although we can clearly see God's light in our littlest angels, each of us is designed by God to shine God's light. Over the years, our luminosity tends to fade. Every unkind word, every poke, every jab, every neighbor mistreated, every gift hidden, every resource hoarded adds layers of grime over our radiant light. Every hand unextended, every gift squandered, every road not taken, every opportunity missed adds layers of apathetic dust to our radiant light. Grace gives way to grime. Light and luminosity are covered in the shadows of loss.

The world tells us that we will find our light through consumption and purchases of stuff. When we wear shiny rings or drive shiny cars, we are told, we will shine. But deep down inside we all know the truth. We know that no car, no stone, nothing can shine God's light except the ones God designed to shine – you and me.

Our journey out of the bleak midwinter and onto mountaintops reveals some very important truths today.

First, God never forgets us. In spite of our aging, our grime, our dust, despite our scars and our fears, our upsets and setbacks, God sees us as light shiners. God knows we have buried our luminosity beneath layers of things and stuff. God offers us the gift of transfigured eyes, so that we might see as God sees. When we see ourselves struggling to shine, we can wipe off the grime and dust and begin again, each and every day. With God's help, we can become radiant again.

Second, God gives us the power to reverse our radiance decline. Each kind word spoken, each embrace extended, each gift given, each neighbor treated well, every road now taken, every

opportunity answered – all strip away grime, all embrace grace. Apathetic dust is swept away and light and luminosity reveal lives healing and pain dissipating. Every day, every step of the way, radiance increases and becomes our reality once again.

Radiance is never far from us. Many of us have radiant people in our lives who seem to exist somewhere between the visible and glorious spectrums. Their grime and dust are gone (or were never built up) and they shine just the way God made them. We call them saints. We hold onto their presence or memories. We need their light in our lives.

I think of Dorothy Cromartie. She has been gone almost three years, but her name came up at a luncheon on Friday. Since then, she has been shining her light on me with a glorious smile that helps strip away my grime and her feather duster has been sweeping away all my apathetic dust.

Do you remember Dorothy? Let me shed a little light today. Each Sunday, we had four greeting lines after the 11 a.m. service – 9th Street, Cleveland Ave., Broad St. and Dorothy Cromartie.

She would hug and hold onto you after saying, “You come here and let me give you a hug.” Dorothy came to Columbus as a retired beautician from Philadelphia – that’s light right there! She cooked and served the homeless poor at Faith Mission, ran a Girl Scout troop well into her 90s, assisted at the Godman Guild, planted and cared for gardens in Weiland Park, attended every BREAD action, and loved her neighbors. She did it with a smile, a hug, a kind word. She prayed like she talked because her praying and talking were one in the same. Her radiance was real. Her appearance of light shining was as genuine as this morning’s sunrise. Nothing hidden. Dorothy was designed to shine and she did. But, I must add, Dorothy worked every day of her life at grace prevailing over grime and the luster of her light grew through prayer and action, giving selflessly and her heart of humility.

God made each of us to shine just as Elijah, Moses, and Jesus shone. There are some whose radiance bursts forth because nothing covers it up. Call them pure of heart. Call them saints or luminaries. Like the disciples, we see their light and we want to build shrines dedicated to their discipleship. Rather, we should remember Jesus' words that each of us is a temple of God's love. Each of us is designed by God to shine.

On this Transfiguration Sunday, I pray that God gives you eyes to see in the glorious spectrum of God's light. I pray that God gives you eyes to see yourself as God sees you – a luminous being in need of some scrubbing and dusting. But, most of all, as beloved and beautiful a child of God whom God has designed to shine! May you shine God's light now and through all eternity. Amen.