



Grace Lutheran
Church, ELCIC

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SERMONS



TRANSFIGURATION C and DIACONAL MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

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

“Mirroring Jesus”

The famous American movie director, Stephen Spielberg, made a film in the late seventies called *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. It’s about the landing of a space ship and a man who has a close encounter with an alien. One of the most amazing things about the film is the cinematography, in which Spielberg expertly used the medium of light to signify the power and presence of this alien visit.

The Bible tells us that God is clothed in light, and that God visited our planet in form of a special human being named Jesus, who said, “I am the light of the world.”

Today’s Scripture readings are about close encounters with God, and with God’s Son Jesus. The first lesson is about Moses going up a mountain, and encountering God so closely that Moses’ face shone for a number of days, with such a bright light that the Israelites couldn’t even look at it. Moses had to put on a veil when he was in front of the Israelites.

But God transferred not only light and glory to Moses, but also enlightenment. Moses was inspired to write down the Ten Commandments, and later on expanded them into the whole Old Testament Law, called the Torah.

St. Luke tells us in today’s Gospel reading that Peter, James and John experienced a close encounter with God. They saw their rabbi and guru Jesus radiating an almost blinding light. They also saw Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus in the middle of this light. This “transfiguration”, this God-encounter, transformed the disciples. It was life-changing, but they didn’t speak of it until much later, perhaps because they thought people would think they were crazy.

I have had milder kinds of God-encounters in my life, and I'm sure you have too. Mine have been more like Jacob's, who awoke from sleep in the middle of the desert after dreaming of a stairway to heaven, and exclaimed (Genesis 28:16) "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."

I have had many such "aha!" experiences in my life: "little epiphanies" you could call them, or "enlightenments" – times when something became so clear and simple that I say to myself: "Dummkopf! Why didn't this register in your brain before this!"

Let me mention just one "enlightenment" I had not long ago. All my life I've been like my father, who always had this compulsion to "get things done". Get it done! But in my old age, I've been approaching tasks differently. Even when I'm doing easy things like folding the laundry, I say to myself: "Thank you, God, that you've given me something to do, and the capability of doing it!" I'm happy in my work. Life is good!

For me, these little epiphanies are times when my view of God shifts and my view of myself shifts, in a more positive direction.

Today's gospel lesson, I believe, is a call to us, to be open to such experiences, "close encounters" with God, whether they are dramatic and life-transformative (as with the disciples on the mountain or Paul on the Damascus road) or just small epiphanies that change your life somewhat.

Jesus' disciples would recall their mountaintop experience later on, and they would remember it as God's assurance to them: that God would be with them when they came down from the mountain. This assurance helped them in their challenging work of ministry in the world. They would remember it as a foretaste of the glory to come, a special encounter with God which inspired them and encouraged them for the future.

You and I have been blessed by Jesus' call for us to be disciples, and we too should remember that God will be with us as he was with the early disciples. Jesus will walk with us on our travels through the good and the bad, and during our exits and departures, even the final one through the valley of the shadow of death.

When the disciples got back down the mountain, they were reluctant to communicate what they had seen and heard there. But they acted upon that experience. They became servants of God and servants of people, no matter what their day-job was. Even the apostle Paul continued to be a tent-maker when he was short of cash.

Today is Diaconal Sunday, when we remember and give thanks for people like Brigitte, who have been officially ordained as Deacons in the ELCIC. They are called “deacons” because deacon means a person who is specially called to “*diaconía*”, which means “Christian service”.

Since the first century, the traditional orders of ministry have been bishops, presbyters (which evolved into pastors) and deacons. The work of pastors has been characterized (and oversimplified) as “ministry of Word and Sacrament”, and the work of deacons as “ministry of Word and Service”.

The truth is, we are all called to be ministers of word and service, though not professionally, the way deacons are. For all of us Christians, service should be a way of life. This is what Paul spoke of in today’s second reading, to the Corinthians. Here are the last four verses:

3:17 “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

3:18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror (Can you look at yourself in the mirror and see the glory of God?) we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

4:1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart (we are not discouraged).

4:2 We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone, in the sight of God.”

Service in Jesus’ name is our ministry. Let us not be discouraged.

Amen.

There’s a hymn based on these verses in the United Church hymnal.

“*We Have This Ministry*” can also be found on YouTube at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3gOOnRKtME>

~ Pastor Jim Hill