Last Sunday of Epiphany All Saints’ Church

Transfiguration, February 7, 2016 Year C

Exodus 34:29-35 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Psalm 99 Luke 9:28-36 [37-43a]

One of my favorite stories comes from the traditions surrounding the 8th century saint, Rabia (as told by Jamal Rahman, in *Fragrance of Faith*):

Outdoors, under a well-lit streetlight, Rabia was looking for a lost key. Neighbors joined her in her search with no success.

“Where did you think you dropped it?”

“Oh, not here, but in my house.”

Trying not to laugh, they asked, “Why aren’t you looking for your lost key in your house?”

“My house is dimly lit; it’s so much brighter out here.”

The neighbors couldn’t help but laugh.

And this is when she imparted her teaching: “Friends, it is clear that you are intelligent. Then why is it when you lose your peace of mind or happiness, perhaps because of a failed relationship, job or hope, you look for what was lost out there and not within (pointing to her chest).

This morning’s gospel story is about the dazzling light of Jesus’ face, his clothes, his whole countenance…. His transfiguration into glory on a mountaintop….. his change… his almost unbearable lightness of being.

And the gospel story is also about our own transfiguration, the call to look within to how the “transfiguring” is happening always, for all of us. We too are light. Where do we find it?

We often assume that to look within, we will not find light. It will be too dark and too difficult to find our way, dimly lit as it may well be. Yet, as Rabia reminds us, yes, maybe it is dimly lit, but that’s the whole point- it takes work to discover the light within, a good and holy work.

There’s another story I love coming from the Persian tradition of the Holy Fool who is also a wise soul.

The teacher, the mullah, the trickster are some of his names, and he is often ridiculed as full of nonsense. Not much different than the Shakespearian fool, his role is to loosen the defensive, ego-inflated postures we sometimes take, often unconsciously, which assist (unfortunately) in us losing touch with deeper Reality.

Here’s one of my favorites (as told by Jamal Rahman):

During lunch break at work, the Mullah was exasperated. Every time he opened his lunchbox, there was a cheese sandwich, day after day, week after week, a cheese sandwich!

“I am sick and tired of this lousy cheese sandwich!”

His coworkers gave him advice: “Mullah, you don’t have to suffer through a cheese sandwich over and over again. Tell your wife to make something different. Be firm with her!”

“But, I’m not married.”

“Then who makes your sandwiches?”

“Well, I do!”

Observe yourself with kindness…. Vigilant, yes, but with a gentle eye. Let the light shine with awareness and compassion as you look at the ways you might be stuck in your own “making of cheese sandwiches.”

Remember, God doesn’t love us, so we can change. ***God’s love for us changes us.***

The disciples are stuck- in a strange way. They are stuck in the light of their joy. Here’s Jesus…. The Man!!

The hungry are being fed, the blind see, the forgotten are being welcomed. And these disciples, Peter, John and James and others are seeing in new ways, being fed in new ways, being liberated to think that even simple fisherman have the power to be a part of God’s Kingdom.

They are like one of my favorite lines from Ephesians: “The eyes of their hearts are becoming enlightened.”

And yet there is hardship as well. Notice just as they experience Jesus, all lit up, with Moses and Elijah appearing, they fall asleep!

What! The gospel writer Luke wants us to remember that the disciples will also fall asleep during Jesus’ greatest trial in the garden of Gethsemane.

Moses and Elijah are talking to Jesus about his “departure”; in the Greek the word is “Exodus.” Oh yes, just like Moses and Elijah, Jesus will take us on an exodus journey which will liberate us from slavery and move us to freedom.

Yet, the disciples are stuck in the power of their joy and their view of how liberation will take place. They are afraid that the darkness of death will overcome the light. They ignore all that Jesus has been telling them.

They aren’t listening very well. Jesus keeps “namedropping” this terrible twist to his life (and theirs) which will happen when they arrive in Jerusalem…… He’s got to die. (oh yeah, that).

No wonder, when Peter, John and James wake up, Peter says (basically), “We’re hanging here. This light and power are just too good to be true, so let’s capture it.”

So natural… who wouldn’t want to freeze the moment? Last week, while driving to Hancock, around 4:00 pm, the light was so stunning, I pulled over to just take it in. I believe that there is a pull to stay in this kind of beauty forever, because we recognize it as true. We came from this beauty and we will return to this beauty. It triggers something deep and eternal within us… I know many of you have felt this, whether caught by the awe and beauty of nature, or witnessing a kind act- saving a dog from a lake’s broken ice, defending a helpless child, preparing the bed for your dying parent, or coming to a new understanding or a new forgiveness… or feeling forgiven yourself…. There is a pull to stay in the experience forever because it originates from “for ever.”

But alas, we can’t, and we move on into life. I put my car in drive and I was on my way.

This is the invitation of Lent- to get back on the road and to come off the mountain top of glory and travel with Jesus and all that that will entail. And in Lent, we are being challenged to discern for the light… the light within and without, and often, if not always, that discovery takes effort.

One of my Lenten practices which sounds easier than it is, is to wake up every morning and before I do anything to give thanks to God for the first five things that come to mind. They change every day.

I’m starting this now, to give myself a head start and I haven’t done it yet.. This morning it wasn’t until I was making tea, did I remember. But even if I am “late,” I give thanks… for my big toe that is usually cranky and wasn’t so cranky this morning, for the paths paved so that we can all walk into the church easily, that my heat came on all by itself, that my daughters call me to share with me their lives, that I am healthy…

Our spiritual sages call this Eucharistic living, praying our lives, waking up to the grace that surrounds us, and when we do, when we are intentionally grateful, it literally shapes us. We are physically changed. We begin to see the world differently. Just as we take in the bread and wine and we are changed, when we give thanks we are changed…. And there is light…So that we too can see, entering into our joys and into our sufferings, we can walk with Jesus wherever he will take us…. So that the eyes of our hearts become enlightened as well.

AMEN.