

Entwined

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17: 1-9

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2 Peter 1:16-21

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. 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. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Matthew 17: 1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

This would be such a bizarre story if it were not so familiar to us as Jesus took three of his disciples—including Peter, the Rock, the one on whom Jesus would build the church-- and they hiked up a mountain. Whatever normalcy they had been sharing as they walked and talked, got sweaty, dirty and dusty, suddenly and abruptly came to a halt. A vision—one that Jesus would later tell them not to tell anyone about until he had been raised from the dead—transformed Jesus from his earthly appearance to what we can only imagine as his divine appearance. ‘And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.’ Awestruck at the sight, there is even more as Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, are speaking with Jesus. Peter somehow finds it within himself in the midst of this incredulous moment to want to hold onto who and what is happening by building three dwellings for them. In his mid-sentence God’s voice echoes through a bright overshadowing cloud, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

The disciples, unable to handle any more, collapse on the ground, trembling in fear, in awe, in confusion. It is Jesus' gentle touch—the Jesus they know—who helps them up, and reassures them. “Get up and do not be afraid.”

The Transfiguration of Jesus is a yearly part of our worship story as it brings us from Epiphany—the season of light—to Lent—the season that embraces the darkness of the human condition. We see Jesus transfigured, transformed, from earthly to divine, from humanity to deity. We can envision it as science fiction, as a Steven Spielberg movie trailer, far more easily than so many biblical stories that we can not only understand, we can feel ourselves entwined, entangled, immersed and present in them.

We are easily like Peter, James and John, wanting time away with Jesus, time to just step away from the hectic busyness of our days, time to be in prayer or meditation, time to read or reflect, time to talk and time to listen. When we are dusty and dirty and tired from exhausting and painful life experiences that are emotional mountain climbing, it matters that we feel Jesus' presence alongside us, our footsteps in unison. When we have an amazing experience or insight or understanding, when we are awed by as poet Gerald Manley Hopkins' says, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God," we want to hold on to it, savor it, dwell in it, to freeze that moment in time. Perhaps because of illness, grief or challenge we want, we need, the gentle and calming touch of Jesus and the tender reassurance, ‘do not be afraid.’ When we come to the other side of a difficult encounter, a time of chaos, strengthened and encouraged because of our faith in Jesus, we come down from that mountain eager and ready to carry on.

Our ability to be entwined with the disciples, of experiencing their experiences as our own, naturally falls short of seeing Jesus adorned in grandeur, Jesus arrayed in all his glory. We may have other mountain top experiences—the literal ones as we take in the breathtaking views from the White Mountains, or Mount Monadnock, or even out to Yosemite—or the spiritual ones that are a moment of experiencing a dramatic expression of faith as seemingly from out of nowhere, God's presence and purpose becomes a revelation.

We will not see Jesus adorned in grandeur, Jesus arrayed in all his glory, but we will have glimpses that will remind us that the One who was in glory on the mountain, who offers us the gentle healing reassurance when we are most in need, is the same One who is with us every step of the journey that follows.

We will not see Jesus adorned in grandeur, Jesus arrayed in all his glory, but we will have glimpses of transfiguration, of transformation, when we see someone fully revealed for who they are.

In high school, Kevin McCarty was a nerd long before nerds were cool. Tall and pencil thin he was gangly and awkward. He was just the right size to fit into his locker when he was shoved into it. Also, his horrible acne did nothing to help his situation. When his voice changed in puberty it really did not change much. By our junior year he looked more like an incoming freshman.

But Kevin was also a member of the Drama Club. From his first audition in our sophomore year to his final curtain call in our senior year, Kevin owned the stage. His shy

awkwardness disappeared under the stage lighting. He had a presence, poise and pleasure there as he put on the role and the name of a character. He was not only transformed in the footlights, he was revealed to himself, to the audience, his cast mates and the stage crew every performance, as we all saw a glimpse of Kevin's truest self.

Our ability to speak and our ability to sing involve two different parts of the brain, so when dementia impacts speech singing often continues. Rose was in the later stages of dementia and had long ago lost her ability to speak, to sit without support, to walk or to feed or dress herself. Yet there was an ability that remained and it brought her great joy.

For decades Rose had been a kindergarten teacher but now she was living on a secured dementia unit of a nursing home. Leading her classroom of five-year-olds in song in their music circle for two generations also had a positive impact on this stage in her life. Long after she had lost the ability to speak, Rose could loudly and clearly and frequently sing 'The Alphabet Song,' 'This Little Light of Mine,' 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,' 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game,' 'The Wheels on the Bus,' 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' and many others.

When she was singing she was happy, and back in time. She was no longer a non-verbal, totally dependent elderly woman with dementia, but instead was Miss Rose, kindergarten teacher. She was transformed into her truest self, giving us all a glimpse of who God had created her to be.

We can see ourselves entwined with Jesus's disciples, but we are also entwined with glimpses of the revelation of God in our midst.

Peter, an eyewitness to the vision of Jesus' majesty, saw the revelation of the Son of God whose glory had been previously hidden, and from that day—with many human stumbles and fumbles along the way—became the rock on whom the Church was built.

On stage Kevin was an actor, not a nerdy outcast. In her singing Rose was a teacher, not a frail and confused elderly woman. Kevin and Rose would have understood Peter's desire to build dwelling places and stay on that mountain with Jesus in his glory. And I think we understand it too. Amen.