

**Sermon for Last Epiphany – Transfiguration Sunday  
March 3, 2019 – Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio  
The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

***Dazzling: A Blessing Built For Motion\****

Who can believe it? We are on the threshold of the holy season of Lent! We have long since said goodbyes to Christmas, Epiphany, and today, we say our goodbyes for a season to the shouting, singing, .... of the Alleluias we sometimes take for granted in our liturgies as in our lives.

I know that you have done it here as I have in other parishes and that is the “Burying of the Alleluia” where the alleluia banner is processed in with alleluia hymns and celebrated excitedly in the liturgy only at the end to be processed out amidst more alleluias and “buried” or put away in the darker, more reflective, more penitential season of Lent. Lent, the word, interestingly enough comes from the Old English, meaning Spring. I rather love that about this word. It allows me to shake off my early formation in the faith that only stressed my wretchedness, not my belovedness, the story of original sin in creation, not the original blessing that it was, and creation still is. To remember that Lent means Spring leads me to reflect on the truth, beauty, fertility, and recreative power of darkness wherein new life is conceived and from which the diversity of all life emerges. If you have read Barbara Brown Taylors, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, and I recommend that you spend time reading it, the inherently divine power of the paschal mystery: life, death, and resurrection, is placed in the context of gift and blessing. Like psalm 139, “Darkness is not dark to you. The night is as bright as the day.” So, I invite with alleluias buried deeply in my heart, the recreative, reflective, grace that is darkness, restrained living, reflective practices to have their way with me this Lent.

But wait... before we step over the threshold that is the holy season on Lent on Ash Wednesday, we are given the powerful, majestic, glorious, miraculous Biblical stories of this Transfiguration Sunday to take into the season of Lent. These are gifts, my friends, invitations, really to dwell in the quiet, dimmer, more contemplative spaces and practices of your life and do so knowing, believing, and even expecting that you will meet the Divine in these 40 days.

How does this spiritual practice, of “metanoia”, or repentance that truly means turning all the way around and orienting yourself once again, toward the Divine in Jesus Christ? What if, you took these two biblical texts before us this day, and spent quality, reflective, intentional, prayerful time meeting the Divine “face to face” as you will, over the next 40 days instead of groveling before God, giving up something instead to taking on something more loving, more compassionate, more humbling in your daily lives?

Not that giving up or sacrificing something you enjoy, or perhaps even enjoy too much is not a good Lenten practice. What I am suggesting is that instead of focusing on the punitive nature of sacrifice, of unworthiness, guilt and shame (as if we have not learned how to bear all those things in our hearts) as they spill over into our lives. How about taking on a sacrificial act of love... making time to be intentionally compassionate on behalf of someone you know desperately needs it, or even, making time to be intentionally more compassionate toward your very self? I suggest that if you make such efforts, you will meet the Holy One face to face, just as Moses and Jesus do on those mountaintops.

In my own life, at an early age, groveling before God was easy... sacramental confession from age 6 (making up sins to confess... I always thought that somehow lying in the confessional was way worse than not going to confession at all... but that's another story.) In the darkness of that confessional, where the priest sat in the shadows as I came to believe that God was only in the shadows of my life, somehow encouraged a very different me to emerge from the darkness of confessing unworthiness, which, my friends is quite another thing from confessing my intentional sinful attitudes and actions. And so my unworthiness before God seemed somehow to be redeemed or at the very least, endured, my an overzealous striving for perfection. Would any of you know what the pain of perfectionism and unrelenting competitiveness can do to one's spirit? The darkness becomes unbearable in the confessional just as the darkness of our lives can be... right in the light of day.

It's why I love the collect for purity (p. 323, 355 in the BCP) which we will say during Lent: *Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.* This prayer says it all... no groveling needed! I love you just the way you are. So pray this prayer and live into its grace and healing.

This Sunday, my friends, we are given an opportunity to reflect on what it truly means to be close to God. Moses comes off that mountain having spent 40 days face to face with God. And coming down from this intimate experience, Moses is described in such a way that his face shone so that he had to veil it from the people who were, rightly so, terrified. Moses does not shine as a result of his own charisma. Moses is invited into an intimate encounter with God and given words to say, he becomes a bearer of the Holy Word of God, and in that spiritual role, Moses shines with the Light of God emanating into the darkness of the people of Israel as they make their idols and forsake the covenant God had made with them. Into that faithlessness, God sheds the Light of mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and repentance and offers them the Light of covenantal love once again. No groveling... a stern rebuke, clear instructions in the commandments, and repentance that turns them once again toward the light of Divine love and redemption.

As if this story were not sufficiently illustrative of God's boundless Love and infinite Grace, we are given the story of Jesus' Transfiguration. I love the full story that includes not only the mountaintop experience but equally as significant is the

conclusion of this story as Jesus comes down from the mountaintop, dazzling from the intimate encounter with Abba, God... Sure, the initially terrified disciples see the Glory of Jesus and the meeting of the Prophets in this miraculous experience and sure, they want to build tents and bask in that glory! Who wouldn't???

We are told that on the next day they come down the mountain. Wouldn't you love to know what it was like the rest of the time in Jesus' glorified and transfigured presence? But what we do know is that Jesus doesn't stay basking in the glory that is his. He leads his most cherished friends back down the mountain and immediately encounters a terrified parent whose own child is suffering.

He tells Jesus that the disciples dismissed him. (after such an experience with Jesus what were they thinking?) Jesus takes a human moment of rebuking such incomprehensible mercilessness and calls the parent and child to come close. In the aftermath of glory, in the aftermath of hearing once again of his own belovedness and power, Jesus heals.

Facing Jerusalem, turning toward his own inevitable death, Jesus, now himself transfigured, takes the dazzling Light of healing down the mountain to offer the suffering, the afflicted, the terrified, the gift of boundless love and compassion.

My friends, this is a very very important lesson to take into Lent. Tuck it in your heart and live into its miraculous grace in the holy season we are about to enter. You and I are called to live transfigured lives. You and I are given glimpses of glory. And we are called the beloved of God. So let us come down the mountain with transfigured hearts, open as never before to the invitation to come ever closer to Jesus. Let us come down the mountain, knowing, believing, and bearing the miraculous Light of Love into our lives and into this world. "Darkness is not dark to you. The night is as bright as the day." The psalmists knew it... Jesus experienced this... and we are invited to walk with him to the mountaintop and down... to be transfigured as he is, into the light of God's love, meant for all.

Here is a blessing prayer written for you to take into the next 40 days. It is by Jan Richardson, and the title is simply, "*Dazzling*."

*Believe me, I know how tempting it is to remain inside this blessing,  
to linger where everything is dazzling and clear.*

*We could build walls around this blessing, put a roof over it.  
We could bring in a table, chairs, have the most amazing meals.  
We could make a home.  
We could stay.*

*But this blessing is built for leaving.  
This blessing is made for coming down the mountain.  
**This blessing wants to be in motion,***

*to travel with you as you return to level ground.*

*It will seem strange how quiet this blessing becomes when it returns to earth.*

*It is not shy.*

*It is not afraid.*

*It simply knows how to bide its time,*

*to watch and wait,*

*to discern and pray*

*until the moment comes*

*when it will reveal everything it knows,*

*when it will shine forth*

*with all it has seen,*

*when it will dazzle*

*with the unforgettable light*

*you have carried*

*all this way.*

My friends, may you carry this unforgettable light of Jesus with you every step of the way into Lent and beyond.

Amen.

*\* With deep gratitude to my sister in faith, Jan Richardson... From her book:  
Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons.*