

February 26, 2017 – Transforming Spirit

Matthew 17:1-9

“And before their eyes, Jesus was transfigured – his face becoming as dazzling as the sun and his clothes as radiant as light. “

Jesus changed; he was transformed right there on a mountaintop in front of Peter, James and John. He shone; he glowed; he emanated light. It was as if an inner bulb had been turned on and it was shining through his entire body and even his clothing

I asked the children earlier today if they had ever met anyone who seemed to glow, to radiate light. I can think of several examples, but I will tell you about one: Helen Thomson, a farmer’s wife in Alsask, SK and my educational supervisor during my student ministry in the Marengo Pastoral Charge. She supervised and basically adopted about a dozen fledgling ministers over the years. Helen has a positive attitude, boundless energy and a ready laugh. She and her husband, Bud, shared their love of life, their wisdom, their endless caring and their deep faith with each of the student ministers who came to Alsask. Bud died a couple of months ago, just before Christmas, and when I talked to Helen on the phone about a week ago I could still hear the sparkle in her voice.

Of course, there are more famous examples. At Christmas I was given a book called “The Book of Joy.” This book is a conversation between two friends: the

Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This conversation took place at the Dalai Lama's home in India. They spent several days talking about joy: what it is, why it can be difficult and how it is possible to be joyful in the midst of pain and suffering. The Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu are two people who are filled with joy, people who seem to constantly glow, and whose faces shine with the power of the Spirit. Just like Jesus' face shone on that mountain top.

But it is important to note that they both live with joy in the midst of pain and suffering. The Dalai Lama has lived nearly all of his adult life in exile. He grew up in Tibet and is the spiritual leader of his people. But while still a young man he fled for his life and sought refuge in India. While living in exile he has watched the suffering of his people under the hands of the Chinese government.

Desmond Tutu lives in South Africa where he led his church through the pain and struggle of apartheid. And for the past twenty years the archbishop has lived with the reality of cancer.

Jesus, of course, also suffered. If you remember today's passage began with the sentence. "Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain to be alone with them." So we ask, "six days after what?" As it turns out, six days earlier Jesus had explained to his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and that when he got there he would suffer at the hands of the Jewish authorities and then he would be killed. According to the gospel of Matthew, Jesus' transfiguration, this brilliant display of the power of the Spirit within his

body, occurred in the midst of his journey to Jerusalem, his journey to suffering and death.

Transformation happens despite pain and suffering. In fact, it often happens because of and in the midst of pain and suffering. We all know something about that don't we? We have had struggles in our lives: illness (mental and physical), addiction, physical injuries, difficult relationships, loss of friends and loved ones, and even loss of employment. We all know pain and suffering. It shows on our faces, in our bodies, it impacts the way we interact with family, with friends, and with the world.

So we come here. We come here looking for community, looking for healing, wanting to be transformed. But how does it happen? What does it take to change? You may remember from last Sunday's sermon that we had a break-in just over a week ago and my laptop was stolen. We got it back on Tuesday, but the thieves had already reformatted the hard drive so everything that had previously been there was gone. It had to be rebuilt from scratch. So we re-installed the operating system and the applications that I use and then I copied over my backed-up files and added all the other pieces that make it mine. My computer is now usable again... its transfiguration is complete.

Wouldn't it be great if we could be transformed that easily? Just a few keystrokes and everything would be wiped clean. All the mistakes we had

made, all the wrong paths we had taken, all the painful moments would be gone in an instant. We could start from scratch. It would be glorious... or would it?

Think of all the things, all the memories we have stored in our bodies, in our hearts and in our minds. Would we really want to lose everything? Think of the people you know who are struggling with Alzheimer's or some other form of dementia and how painful the loss of memory can be. Reformatting our hard drive is really not an option for transformation and that's probably a good thing.

The kind of transformation that we are looking for is usually more subtle. Some of us may remember times in our lives when we underwent a major change and came out on the other side with a whole new point of view or way of being. But most of our transformations are small incremental changes that overtime show-up in how we live and in the light that emanates from our being.

So what do we do? Well the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu both have incredibly rigorous prayer or meditation routines. They are very early risers and start each day with God. The key is a connection with the transforming power of the Spirit. I know Helen Thomson and her husband Bud found their connection with God in the land that they worked and the gardens that they grew. So the question is how, where and when do you connect with the Ground of your Being?

Transformation is not about erasing our past, but rather about connecting more deeply with who we really are, with the divine spark within each of us. We may

never glow like Jesus did on the mountain top or like the Dalai Lama does each day, but we can try to move that next step toward wholeness.

When we do our work as individuals it makes it possible to transform as a community. Today, as we meet to review the past year and set our budget for 2017 let's ask ourselves. What is it in First United Church that needs to be healed? What kind of transformation are we, as a congregation, going through? What would make us shine like a beacon of light in our community?