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The Last Sunday in Epiphany

Transfiguration

Good morning! Today is the last Sunday in Epiphany before we start the season of Lent. This means that today we hear about the Transfiguration; that time where Jesus took a few of his disciples up to a mountain and suddenly was transformed, dazzling, talking to the greats of Israel's history, Moses and Elijah. For a moment it's as if the veil between heaven and earth is pulled back and God's glory is in full view.

It's a spectacular event. And yet, it can be hard not to read it without there being some disconnect. It's so otherworldly. So outside of our everyday experience. We may think, that's nice, but what does it have to do with us? Or how does it apply right now? In our monotonous Covid life, which is not marked by mountaintop experiences, but rather being in the same exact place everyday.

But what we might miss, and what Peter was likely missing when he wanted to stay on the mountain and not go back into real life, is that the Transfiguration wasn't a one-time event. The veil between heaven and earth wasn't just being pulled back there on the mountain. Jesus was doing this every day. Jesus was always helping people see what life with the veil pulled back looked like. Always helping us see God's glory in full view.

He did this by helping people see each other's dignity and value, especially for those who often weren't seen in that way. Like when he welcomed the woman who was a known sinner to anoint his feet and saw her as a child of God when others could not. He did this in the ways he refused to be divided from other people in the way society had prescribed. Like when he went to Zacchaeus the tax collector's house for dinner or sat with the Samaritan woman at the well. He did this when he brought in and made space for the people who typically were excluded: in his time that meant women, children, foreigners, people with illnesses. He did this when he turned conventional understanding on its head in his teaching and parables. Helping people think differently about what really matters in life; what real treasure is.

Jesus saw the world in this way, and he brings us along with him, helping us see, "Oh this is what it looks like." When we look at life with Jesus, we see how dazzling and radiant this life and everyone and everything in it really is. We see how the divine heart is pulling us together as one. And when we're looking at it with Jesus we are filled with God's love for it all.

The challenge is how to keep this view — this veil-pulled-back- way Jesus is showing us — when the reality we're faced with everyday can be so different. There are some very ugly parts of human life. The ways people hurt each other. The ways we misunderstand each other. The small-minded things we do when we're afraid or when we don't have a place to take our sadness. The forms of brokenness that are built into our systems. All of this wears on us and makes it hard to see beyond.

It's why, as Bishop Curry says, faith is always in spite of ([Love Is the Way](#), 24). "To dare to live and act as though the moral arc of the universe is long but bent towards justice, even if you can't see its end." Or as the Apostle Paul says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This faith "in spite of" is a choice we make. It's choosing to see what hasn't yet been fully revealed. And it can transfigure — or change in an elevated way — the reality on this side of the veil, making it a little more like heaven.

I actually came across a rather surprising instance of this recently when I was watching a documentary on the making of the show *Schitt's Creek*. Now if you haven't seen the show it's a comedy that takes place in a small town with very quirky, dysfunctional characters. It's the kind of show that makes you laugh, and cry, and sometimes both at the same time. And it has become so popular that some people are on their 2nd and 3rd time watching it.

But I believe the reason it's so popular and is drawing people in is something very unique and intentional. In the documentary, the co-creator, Dan Levy, said, when they set out to make the show they didn't try to make a case for the dignity of certain characters, as if that had to be fought for. But they assumed their love, beauty and worth as a given from the outset.

In this case they were talking specifically about two gay characters in the show, and how in other shows with gay characters it's like they assume homophobia is given has to be scaled or overcome. But in the world of this show they decided there was no place for that. Levy said, "We show love and tolerance. If you put something like that out of the equation, you're saying that doesn't exist and shouldn't exist."

This applies to every character in the show. There's no racism, no tokenizing characters of color. No belittling things we tend to look down on each other for or let divide us. Whatever the imperfections or idiosyncrasies of the characters, we the viewer have been intentionally put in the position to love and accept them and see their beauty. And, as another actor said, it's not like we're trying to teach people a lesson. We're just saying, "We can live this way, take a look."

The creators of the show went in with this intention. To help viewers see the world in a certain way. And it was one of those things that pulled the veil back and helped people see God's glory in full view.

It's not easy to look beyond, it's an act of intention and imagination. And for followers of Christ, what helps us do this even when it's difficult, and the world in front of us is anything but, is Jesus. Spending time with him makes it easier to see: when we read the stories of his life and take in his teachings; when we spend time in Christian community; when we pray with him; when we look for him in the faces of those in need and in our neighbor. Looking at the world with Jesus is what pulls the veil back. It is what helps us see things as they are, God's glory in full view.

Let us draw close to Jesus, and see a world in transfiguration.

Sources

Schitt's Creek, "Best Wishes, Warmest Regards"

Bishop Michael Curry, [Love Is the Way](#)