

Sunday, February 15, 2015
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon - Light from Within

Have you ever seen someone undergo a noticeable physical change?

Sometimes we see someone that we haven't seen in a while and we notice that they look different, healthier, more rested, restored.

Maybe they've lost weight or fallen in love, or retired.

We also see people and mark dramatic changes brought on by illness or grief.

While we are able to notice these changes over time, we are rarely aware of them as they are actually happening.

(My Christmas Amaryllis bulbs finally bloomed this week and they were so extraordinary that I commented that if we stared at them long enough we might be able to see the blooms opening.)

Last week, Jo Loi sent me a Tedx video of filmmaker Louie Schwartzberg discussing his lifelong passion for time-lapsed photography of flowers.

By photographing a flower over and over again Schwartzberg is able to capture the process allowing you to literally see life unfold.

It is beautiful and it is extraordinary.

He said that when people view his work they most often say "Oh My God."

'Oh,' he says, means something has caught your attention;

'My' means what you have seen connects to something deep within your soul;

'God' he defines as that personal journey we all want to be on, to be inspired, to be connected to a universe that inspires beauty.

I would add that we utter, 'God' when we are awestruck by the magnitude of the miracle we are witnessing.

'*Oh My God,*' (or OMG as texters would say.)

I imagine that Peter, James and John uttered similar words when they saw Jesus transfigured.

'Transfigured' does not just mean a change in shape or appearance.

'Transfigured' means to transform into something more beautiful or elevated – to give a new and typically exalted or spiritual appearance to.

This is what those three disciples witnessed.

They saw Jesus transform into something more beautiful than they had ever seen.

Oh My God.

This past week I had the chance to visit Anne Hughes and her godson in Washington, DC.

As you know, Anne donated one of her kidneys to 15-year old Hamed, so that he might live.

Oh My God.

Seeing both of them just a week after their surgery I can tell you they met the definition of transfigured.

More beautiful, spiritually awake, a light shining in the darkness.

The disciples on the mountain with Jesus had the opportunity to witness a miracle.

They were able to experience an ordinary walk as something extraordinary.

They were given the chance to see the man they had come to love, to admire, to follow, reach his full God-given potential.

Jesus shown with the light of God's love – from within.

That is why it looked different than anything the disciples had witnessed before.

The divine light, shining from within, changed even the color of his clothing that became “dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.”

They were better than our best.

Not a laundry commercial, but a reminder that God is greater than we can ever be.

I'm sure the disciples were trying to figure out what was going on when they heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

You remember that Mark opened his gospel in chapter one with Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan with a voice from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

So here, for the second time, God weighs in on Jesus' identity.

At the start of the ministry God assured Jesus that he was beloved and that God was pleased.

He wanted Jesus to know that he was not alone, that God, his Father was with him – no matter what happened.

Now, near the end, God wants to be certain that the disciples understand the importance of their mission.

He wants Peter, James and John to know that their teacher is indeed the Son of God.

This knowledge will sustain them in the days ahead.

As they journey to Jerusalem they will remember God's voice and Jesus' divine light.

They will be bolstered in their own ministry by having had this experience of God's presence.

They have seen God's glory and their hearts and souls will be transformed.

God's glory and God's communication are two ideas that may, at first glance, seem to be thoroughly theological and philosophical, with our everyday lives.

However, one writer pointed out that it is the loss of our ability to perceive God's glory and to hear God's voice that has resulted in much of the injustice we encounter in the world.

When we fail to see, as the Psalmist describes it, *God's glory shining over and through the created world*, it becomes easy to use the earth and its resources as commodities, forgetting their sacred nature.

When we fail to recognize that Jesus is the image of God, revealing God's character and values, God's ways and God's purposes, it is easy to believe that God calls us to actions that contradict Christ's sacrificial life and teaching

When we fail to recognize that God's glory is also revealed in all people – that Christ hides within them in a “distressing disguise” (as Mother Teresa put it), it becomes easy to abuse, dehumanize and exploit others.

But, when we learn to recognize God's glory in Christ, we also learn to recognize God's glory in all things and in all people – and this changes everything.

The moment our lives become flooded with glory we grow more celebratory, more compassionate.

We become more careful of other people and of the earth, more just and more selfless.

God's glory draws us into a life that seeks to reflect that glory.

More, when we become aware of God's glory, and begin to reflect it, we also become those who, like Christ, call glory out of everyone we meet, inviting them to radiate as God has created them to.

We listen to hear the voice of God's affirmation even as Christ did, even in the darkest parts of our lives.

Perhaps it sounds naïve to yearn for a world where people have the capacity to recognize glory wherever it may be found.

This, however, is the capacity that sustains relationships, that maintains communities, that unites people and that drives us into selfless service of one another and of our world.

Without a vision of God's glory, of God's kingdom on earth, it is difficult to work for true justice and healing.

But, with this vision, no sacrifice is too much in the quest to let God's Reign be manifest among us – not even the cross.

We must learn to look for God – to seek the divine in everything we do.

Lent begins on Wednesday.

Make a commitment to notice God every day.

Make a list.

Keep track.

By the time Easter arrives, you will be making your way through your days with the simple prayer, 'Oh My God,' on your lips.

I want to end with a poem by Mary Oliver:

Poem (the spirit likes to dress up)

The spirit

likes to dress up like this:

ten fingers,

ten toes,

shoulders, and all the rest

at night

in the black branches,

in the morning

in the blue branches

of the world.

It could float, of course,
but would rather
plumb rough matter.
Airy and shapeless thing,
it needs
the metaphor of the body,
lime and appetite,
the oceanic fluids;
it needs the body's world,
instinct
and imagination
and the dark hug of time,
sweetness
and tangibility,
to be understood,
to be more than pure light
that burns
where no one is --
so it enters us --
in the morning
shines from brute comfort
like a stitch of lightning;
and at night
lights up the deep and wondrous
drownings of the body

like a star.