



Sermons from Northwood United Church

"Seeing the same things differently"

Exodus 34:29-35 Luke 9:28-36

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May the words of our mouths, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

"I was walking along, minding my business, when love came and hit me in the eye. Flash! Bam! Alakazam! Wonderful you came by." Yes, I am stealing from Jazz Vespers.

An encounter with love. Falling in love can feel like such a whirlwind when life takes a dramatic turn- and everything is different. We feel different. The world, the future, life looks different. My grade 11 Julia, was explaining the body and brain chemistry of that phenomenon this week and I thought, Wow! They are teaching kids that in grade 11 these days. I wish somebody had explained that to me in grade 11. It would have saved me a world of embarrassing.

Flash! Bam! Alakazam! The heart quickens, the light goes on. And apparently the dopamine receptors go WooWhooo! That's an encounter with romantic love. How about a divine encounter? An encounter with holy mystery. I wonder if there is brain and body chemistry that goes with that too.

Those of us who spend a lot of time in church will have heard Luke's story of the transfiguration before, so we may be a bit immune to its weirdness. Let us forget for a moment that Luke's story may not be a factual account of an historical moment. We are not concerned with history here. We are concerned with epiphany, which ordinary time and space cannot contain. This is the end of the season of epiphany, the season of aha! Our eyes and minds are opened, and it began with wise ones whose eyes were opened to reality in the birth of this child of Bethlehem. The season ends with another weird, eye-popping story.

Luke's version begins with Jesus wanting to pray, but not alone. So he takes Peter, James and John with him to the top of "the" mountain. "The" mountain? What mountain? Why "the" mountain instead of "a" mountain? Maybe because it was the mountain with which they were all familiar, and we are just out of the loop. Maybe Or more likely it was because for them, every mountain, no matter where it was, was a stand-in for the larger than life mountain in the Hebrew imagination. "You know the mountain we're talking about- the mountain where stuff happens and you're never the same." Once the people of Israel had seen Mount Sinai smoking with the presence of the Lord, and Moses coming down with his face on fire, there were no "a" mountains anymore. Every mountain was "the" mountain, the place where the fiery God might just be encountered again.

And while Jesus was praying, he too caught fire from within up on the mountain. His face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Then, in the circle of his spotlight, two other figures appeared--Moses the lawgiver and the prophet Elijah--dead heroes of the past alive in the present, as if time were nothing but a veil to be parted and stepped through.

"They appeared in glory," Luke tells us.

I told you it was a weird story. But from these stories and other stories comes the phrase we more commonly used for more common or at least less other-worldly experiences- mountain-top experiences- experiences that have a spiritual component, a divine weirdness that you may point to later in life that changed you somehow. Have you ever had what you would call a mountain top experience- something that you point to later like these disciples did, and say,

"Wow, that was a time when I really felt close to God- that is a time that has a certain glow about it in my memory- a certain glory." Think about that for a second, and see if you can name a time. Honestly, for me, sometimes my mind is drawn to beautiful moments in my life -the birth of a child, a powerful moment in the wilds, but at least as often I think about hard times, scary times, times when I felt vulnerable and small, times of loss or grief, even times when I danced on the edge of feeling utterly alone. These too are moments of encounter, when the veil is lowered and we seem to be able to step through it, when the scales fall from our eyes, and we encounter life differently, encounter the one who we later realize was there all along and we just didn't recognize it. That's epiphany. That is transfiguration.

A while back in a sermon I said that I didn't believe in an interventionist God, and that kind of caught a few people up. "What? You don't believe that God acts in the world? Why do you pray then?" We had some interesting conversations that followed that. And this story brings me back to that question and makes me want to say a little more. It is not that I don't believe God is active in the world. Oh I do. The unstoppable power of love at the heart of all things is relentlessly active in the world. The power of Christ's gospel is alive and well and let loose in the heart and mind and world. I just think most of the time we don't see the half of it. Most of the time we are blind to it, sometimes willfully and sometimes we're just not paying attention. I don't believe that God acts here and not there, or that God acts in episodes, choosing to heal certain situations and not others, and particularly when we call for it. No, I think that God is way ahead of us, powerfully drawing us out of our small little corners and into community, out of our small mindedness and into grace, out of our combative competitive nature and into communion. We just have to get with the program, open our eyes, let the veil fall, let the scales fall from our eyes and our hearts and see the glory that is right before, right within us, all the time.

And that is why Jesus gathered with his friends around the table. I said the table not a table, because after you sit with Jesus around his table there is no "a table" anymore. All tables then take on a sense of the holy, of the sacred, a place of epiphany, and transfiguration where ordinary bread and ordinary wine becomes both reminder and expression of sacred grace and divine communion. You see the glorious encounter with the divine that has, in the religious imagination of our ancestors, been associated with the mountain, in Jesus has been brought down from the mountain and it is at the table, the meal, the feast where the veil is lifted, the scales fall from our eyes, and life is transfigured: enemies can be seen as poor beggars on the road just like us, the common table becomes the table of plenty and abundance, simple fare becomes rich and nourishing sustenance for the body and soul, and we, Northwood, with all our warts and roof leaks, puzzles about the future and deep desires to make a difference, we, amazingly become the body of Christ. Bread for the world. Thanks be to God.

Amen.