

Youth Sunday/Transfiguration Sunday
February 7, 2016
Luke 9:28-36

.....

“God in the Ordinary”
--Courtney Henry

Let's face it-sometimes we just try too hard. Look at the big picture! Look for the big sign telling you what to do! Just wait and see-the answer will come to you! We spend so much of our time worrying that we are missing what we are supposed to be looking for, that we actually end up missing the point. In our technological, fast paced society we sometimes forget to slow down and take in the small things.

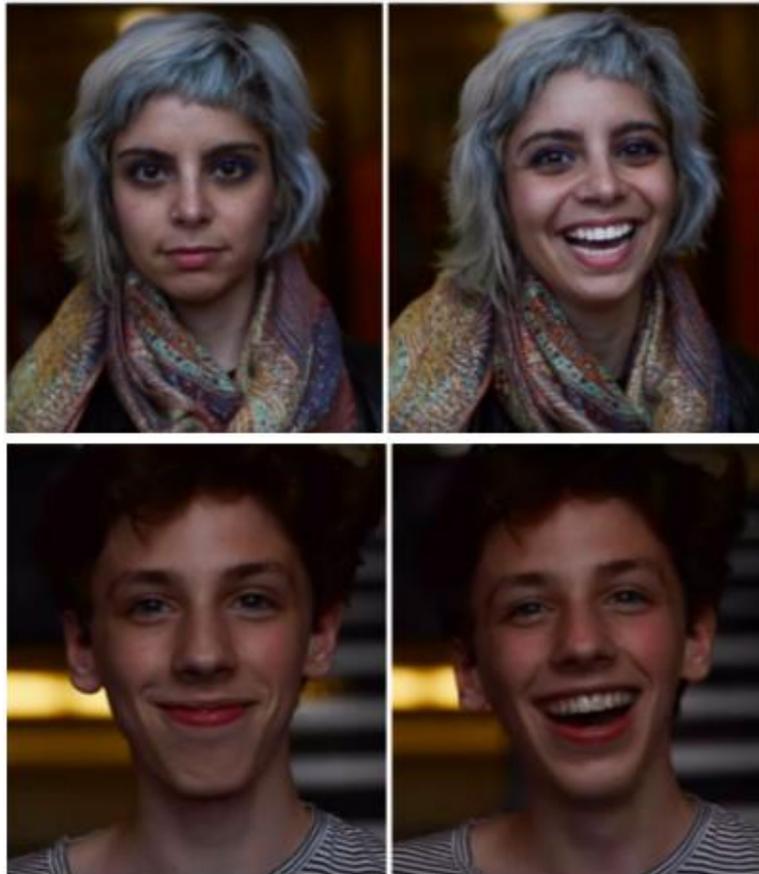
Today's scripture describes Peter, John, and James all standing upon a mountain top with Jesus. Much to the surprise of the three men, Jesus' form begins to change. The three men are witnessing a great transfiguration of both Jesus' appearance but also a movement which is about to shape Jesus' future ministry. In the midst of this amazing transformation, Peter is missing the point.

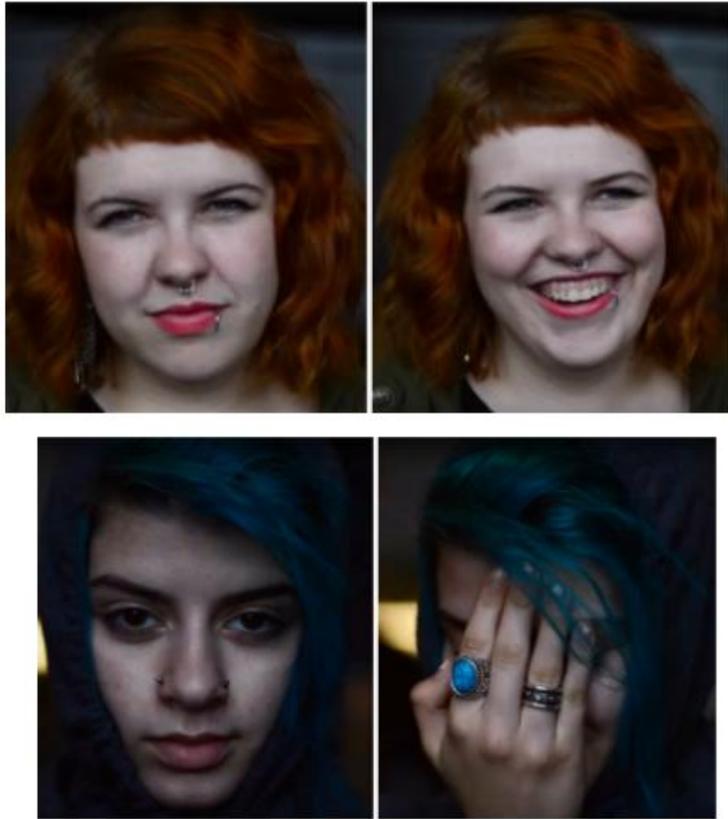
This grand transformation has just taken place and here we see Peter scrambling around trying to make places for everyone to stay. God was showing him about all that is to come for Jesus' ministry and future resurrection. But in what Peter seems to be thinking: we are one big happy family up on the mountain top forever- the end. No, not "the end." It is just only the beginning. When I read about Peter's reaction I immediately want to think, "Come on Peter! Get it together! You just witnessed quite the miracle of Jesus transforming and here you are trying to make places for everyone to stay!"

How many times do you think that God has said the same thing about us?
"Child, look! Listen! Get it together!"

We are imperfect. We have Peter moments. Everyday we become so distracted and sidetracked by big and shiny things going on in our lives that we become so caught up in the excitement that we do not recognize the deep moments going on around us. However, we can learn from our Peter moments by slowing down and recognizing what is happening around us. And it is then that we will likely find God amidst the small, the ordinary, or seemingly insignificant moments.

Not too long ago, an 18 year old student, Shea Glover, from Chicago created an independent photography social experiment. She went out into her local area with her camera and began asking people if she could take their picture. Many people questioned her why, but her response? "I am taking pictures of things that I find beautiful" Instead of the classic, "say cheese" she told the people "you're beautiful." Let me repeat that, she told them that they were beautiful. Two simple words. Shea could have said anything else but she chose those words.





Take a look at the pictures up on the screen. Compare the left image to the right image. The left image is before Shea told them that they were beautiful and the image on the right is what happens after Shea told them. This is a literal transfiguration.

Everyone's face changed to reflect how they felt about the moment just like how Jesus' face changed in the scripture. Although everyone responded a bit differently, one thing in common is that so many of the people look really happy or shocked. Transfiguration can be a good thing. How many of you have been told that you are beautiful today? Last week? Last month? God in the small, unexpected moments.

Mountaintop moments are often what we are looking for but not what we get. We picture some kind of grand revelation or change of heart but what if mountaintop moments are everyday moments of grace, love, and hope? Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber writes in her book *Pastrix*, "perhaps God looks upon that which we dismiss as nothing, insignificant, and worthless,

and says “Ha! Now *that* I can do something with.” What if that “thing” that we dismiss is ourselves?

This past summer I found myself running around and often being so busy that I barely had time to eat dinner while participating in the Jeremiah Project at the Montreat Summer Youth Conference. The Jeremiah Project is a special small group for ministry-minded youth who want to deeply explore their faith.



However, in the midst of being incredibly busy, my small group found time Wednesday afternoon to sit down and have a conversation. Now, conversations in the Jeremiah Project were often fueled by laughter and jokes that someone made because you know, we were just undoubtedly excited to be at Montreat.

We were happy-go-lucky people who were fixated on how wonderful our small group was, the beauty of Lake Susan, the love of going rock hopping, and the excitement of hiking Lookout. My small group had almost formulated the thought of “this mountain and Montreat are both so wonderful and we are going to lead worship every night and everything is going to be just wonderful.”

We sounded like Peter. We were so focused on the excitement and wonder of being at Montreat that we almost forgot that at some point we would have to come down from the mountain top. Peter did not want to leave the mountain nor face what was going to come after he left the mountain...but just like Peter, at some point we were going to have to leave and enter the world and all of its pain, disarray, brokenness, and chaos.

The conversation we were about to have as a small group was different. We were serious. With the trust that we had built up with one another, we divulged some of our deepest and darkest stories of our pasts. Anxiety horror stories, multiple suicide attempts, family issues, brokenness. We came to realize that we were not alone and God was with us and would remain so. There, at Montreat, we were listening to one another and to what God was saying to us in the moment.

Look back at Peter, John, and James...these three men are about to be the future of the church but more than likely, they are looking around at one another and saying, "who, me?" Jesus outright brings them together to pray and tell them about the future that they will be pursuing. How many of them were really listening? Peter is so fixated on making sure that everyone has a place to sit and stay that he is missing his future calling. Those of us in the Jeremiah Project were missing our callings too.

Now each of us in my small group had different callings but all in all we were just not seeing them. We were not slowing down. We were not having the important conversations. We were not listening to one another's stories. The thing about Montreat is, is that it is so easy to get caught up in all of the excitement, joy, and good times because you are trying to cram as many good memories and experiences into six days as you possibly can. You get so entangled in the beauty of everything that there is no longer "ordinary, down to earth" moments. Everything is filled with giddy excitement. Now giddy excitement is nothing to brush away because let's be honest, it feels pretty amazing. However, what if my small group had gone all week without having the conversation that we did? What if we had had our heads so far up into the clouds that we never took the ordinary moments and sat down with them?

We needed that conversation. That conversation lead us back to God. Now God was not missing, God had been present that whole week, but for most of us, God was just a fleeting thought every now and again. Same for Peter. God was present up on that mountain top but God was the furthest thing from Peter's mind. We were missing the message and had we missed the message, we might have missed the point of the week. God was trying so

hard to get all of us to sit down and talk to one another about our lives but yet we kept ignoring God's plea.

In scripture God blatantly tells Peter, John, and James, that Jesus is God's son. God outright claims him. This seems to snap the men back into reality. In our stories we shared moments of brokenness and in those moments God claimed us. We were drug back down to earth to look at one another and to say, "you are not alone, I am with you." This is essentially was God was trying to tell the three men up on the mountain, "yes, all of this is going to happen, and yes Jesus' ministry is changing, but I am with you. Do not be afraid to go out." God never leaves us.

Our visions and perspectives might change by growing cloudy over time but we are never alone. This is what those of us in the Jeremiah Project came to realize. We were never alone and we were to be carriers of the light of Christ. We had spent so long focused on other grand schemes that we did not realize we were truly claimed. After the three men came to realize that they were to be lead off the mountain and go back into normal life, their perspectives might have changed again.

They might have been a bit nervous, or excited, or overwhelmed but those feelings were triumphed by the love of God and the support of the other men. This transition was also to be felt and realized by my small group friends. We would have to leave the mountain.

We would to go home and enter back into our normal, daily lives but this time we would not be alone. We would have the support of each other to lean upon when times grew tough or we just needed a laugh. We were to carry the light of Christ off of the mountain top. We were to look more closely for the ordinary or moments in life. We were to take a deep breath and look around us and proclaim, "we are loved, we are claimed, we are called." We are here to listen.

We are the beloved children of God and nothing can ever change that. This is what a mountaintop moment might be like.

A moment that is so pivotal and meaningful but yet came in an almost unexpected way through the company of others.

Amen.

.....

The Transfiguration of the Heart **--Jared Borders**

When we think about the significance of the Transfiguration of Jesus from Luke 9: 28-36, it's easy to get caught up in the splendor of the moment. Here is Jesus, our exalted Savior and the Son of God, transformed so that he appears as bright as "lightning."

And if you are Peter, James, or John on the mountaintop, two of the great figures from the Jewish faith are standing with Jesus: Moses and Elijah. Everything seems so perfect about this moment, so divine and spectacular, so powerful, that it would be so easy to miss the point of such a meeting, just like Peter.

If Jesus appeared in our living room talking with Paul and Peter in a meeting filled with glory and splendor, we would want to erect something on the spot that commemorates that moment in our lives, wouldn't we? Just a reminder that says, "I witnessed something spectacular." But unfortunately, solely focusing on that task would be missing the point entirely.

Because underneath all the divine brilliance is an underlying Truth: Jesus will go to Jerusalem and be killed. After the Transfiguration, it seems that Jesus is always moving toward Jerusalem. Luke 9: 51 states that "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." Luke 13: 22--"Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem." Luke 17:11 starts out "Now on his way to Jerusalem."

It is a road that will bring Jesus to the ultimate test and sacrifice, his departure, a test so great that he prays to his Father on the Mount of Olives in Luke 22: 42 “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me...”

Back on the mountaintop of the Transfiguration, Jesus is not talking to Moses and Elijah about his glory or heavenly qualities or rank. Jesus is not talking about the splendor of his clothes nor the whiteness of his face. Instead, Jesus discusses his “departure,” also translated as his “exodus,” of which “he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”

And despite all the terror and fear and pain that is going to come out of Jesus’s future crucifixion, the Transfiguration allows a message of hope to seep through. That despite the earthly trials that await Jesus, God is in control. Despite, the anger and fear and sins of the Jewish and Roman people to kill Jesus, God is *in* control.

Because although the crucifixion is in the future at the time of the Transfiguration, two of the great figures of Judaism are there to walk Jesus through. Because God himself appears in such power that the disciples were “afraid.”

And then God gives us, and the disciples, one command:

“Listen to him.”

Listen to Jesus, because he knows the trials he will go through and the miracle that will result from it.

Listen to him, because he knows our pain and has beared our sins for us so that we may live.

Listen to him, because despite all that you may not understand,

God is in control.

Strange the use of the word “departure” isn’t it? Why not death? or execution? or even murder? The word departure almost signifies a journey--an exodus from this earthly life to the next, or wherever God sends him. And the special part about the word “departure,” is that it allows room for a return. Death, execution, murder...those words all signify ends. Departure signifies a new beginning, a blank slate from which Jesus can work in the heavenly realm and return to earth in his Resurrection. In the darkest moment of the Christian faith, this hope prevails. Trust in Him, Listen to Him, and *know* that God is in control.

When we take communion today, and you enter into the covenant of His body and blood of life, I would like to invite you to take steps toward a Transfiguration of your heart--a Transfiguration that will silence all the distractions, diversions....all the noise. Because there is so much noise in my life--the noise of my own pride, the noise of people’s expectations for me, the noise of doubt, the noise of fear of failure, the noise of my own sin.

And because truly listening to Christ means finding his Voice despite all that is thrown our way to turn us from Him. And through the fearlessness that comes from knowing Him and hearing His Word, “let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame...Consider him...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Because truly I tell you, if we are ever to change the world around us, we must first transfigure ourselves.

Amen