

***“Perspective”***

Transfiguration Sunday, March 3, 2019  
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

**Scriptures: Exodus 34: 29-35; Luke 9: 28-43a**

**Exodus 34: 29-35 (NRSV)**

<sup>29</sup> Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. <sup>30</sup> When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. <sup>31</sup> But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. <sup>32</sup> Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. <sup>33</sup> When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; <sup>34</sup> but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup> the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

**Luke 9:28-43 (NRSV)**

<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup> They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup> Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” <sup>36</sup> When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

<sup>37</sup> On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup> Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup> Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup> I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” <sup>41</sup> Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” <sup>42</sup> While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup> And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

## Sermon

Recently I went to a local hospital  
to sit with a blessed soul during her experience of healing and hope.  
There came a few moments for me to step out of the room,  
to allow for some privacy with a nurse.  
I got to visiting with another nurse in the hallway, whose accent sounded familiar.  
*"May I ask you a personal question?"* I asked. *"I've traveled in Southern Africa and West Africa. Your accent sounds familiar. By any chance are you from Nigeria, or near there?"*  
"I am from Nigeria," she said.  
*"Very nice! I was in Nigeria for a summer, back in 1982, with a group of Americans and Nigerians sharing a work project, over in the Cross River State."*  
"I am from the Cross River State," she said. "It's called the Akwa Ibom State now."  
*"The people I met there were wonderful. Many are Christians, from the Igbo Tribe."*  
"I am a Christian. I am an Igbo," she said.  
*"Beautiful. That summer I was near the town of Abak. The village is so lovely, so rich and lush."*  
"I am from Abak!" she said. "Oh, I miss it. I have not been back in seven years."

And then the first nurse returned,  
to tell me I could return to my visit with our beloved.  
As my new friend from Abak, Nigeria, and now Atlanta and I parted ways,  
I imagine we made a connection that reminds us  
that sometimes there are no degrees of separation.

We meet so many, many folks along our journeys,  
so busy with our coming and going,  
that when we stop to compare notes and stories  
what we find are commonalities,  
what we gain is some perspective on who and whose we  
are,  
recover from shared pains and longings,  
uncover familiar places and faces and graces.  
Holy connections are made during the pauses we make and create,  
the middle points and spaces that God offers and provides  
to connect us with the Holy in each other.

I heard tell of a missionary in a land foreign to him.  
He traveled toward a distant mission field  
with a local translator and two men to serve as guides.  
As they walked through rough terrain,  
the missionary urged haste,

so excited was he to get started sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.  
One day the guides sat down and refused to go any further.  
The missionary explained again and again about the urgency,  
and then finally asked the translator to inquire of the guides  
why they would not get up and go toward the destination.  
One of the guides spoke up and quietly said to the missionary,  
*"We must sit here and wait for our spirits to catch up with our bodies."*

We pause here in the middle, waiting for our spirits to catch up,  
to connect with the Holy, with one another, with our true selves.

This morning's Word from the Scriptures reminds us that we are a "trans" people.

Trans is a Latin root word meaning across; beyond; through.

Used as a prefix, trans describes when something or someone  
is changed thoroughly, altered,  
made different than what it or we once were.

For example, Transylvania University was founded further west  
than any college in its day,

founded over there, through the woods, trans-syl-va-nia,  
or, to put it in southern talk, o'er yonder.

To transcend is to rise above, to go beyond, eclipse, outshine.

To be transformed is to be reformed, renewed, remade in God's image.

To be transfigured, like Jesus was atop a high mountain with Moses and Elijah,  
is to transform into something more beautiful or elevated,  
to change, alter, to experience a metamorphosis.

Listen again to a story of transfiguration, Christ's and our own.  
Overhear the Gospel.

*28 ...Jesus took with him Peter and John and James  
and went up on the mountain to pray.*

Jesus and three disciples slipped away from the crowds and the busyness,  
the daily grind and the craziness,  
got away from it all to pray,  
to be alone with the Holy,  
to remember Who and Whose they were,  
because sometimes we forget, need reminding.

*29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed,  
and his clothes became dazzling white.*

When Jesus prayed to God, He was transfigured,  
transformed into something more beautiful or elevated,  
his appearance changed, altered, an experience of metamorphosis.  
Jesus took off his mask, letting his inner light shine.  
And suddenly, it was as if God was right there, present, nigh,

all around and inside, all at the same time, yet time stopped.  
He left linear Kronos time and took on a holistic Kairos experience.  
He was transfigured before them;  
his joy radiated so much  
that his very clothing appeared to dazzle and glow.  
The disciples were transfixed as Jesus was transformed.

<sup>30</sup> Suddenly [the disciples] saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to [Jesus].  
<sup>31</sup> They appeared in glory  
and were speaking of his departure,  
which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

In their awe, the disciples saw Jesus standing with Elijah and Moses,  
the two main spiritual bookends of Judaism resurrected and present!  
Elijah represented the Prophets;  
Moses was the giver of the Law;  
together they would have been recognized and revered  
as the ones to deliver and prophecy,  
to lead God's people to safety and salvation,  
to guide us to return with thanksgiving and joy  
to the One who Created and Creates.

We can imagine the disciples thinking, *"My Lord and my God!"*

Moses and Elijah in glory

--radiating the same joy, the same power, the same love for God –  
stood with Jesus of Nazareth, a rabbi, a teacher, a humble carpenter.  
who was suddenly keeping company with the Great Ones.

Moses and Elijah spoke with him about his departure,  
what he was to accomplish at Jerusalem, at the Cross on Calvary.

We pause here.

Here we wait, in wonder, with wonder, at the wonder of it all.

Betwixt.

Between.

In limbo.

In the middle.

This passage is set in the middle of Jesus' ministry,  
halfway between His Baptism and Resurrection,  
Just like the at the River Jordan, we again hear the voice of God  
out of the clouds and mist, saying,  
*"This is my Son, My Chosen. Listen to Him!"*

This narrative is set in the middle,  
between the calling of the disciples,  
initially all eager for the journey to be fishers of people,  
and their later weariness,  
so weary they can't stay awake in the Garden of  
Gethsemane

while Jesus prays.

This Scripture is set in the middle,  
on a mountaintop,  
from where we can see from whence we have come,  
where we might catch a glimpse of what we are about to accomplish,  
at Jerusalem, on the way, with God, following God, together.

This providential Word is right on target for today, for such a time as this.  
We are transfixed, transformed, transformed right where we are, here in the middle.

We as a people, as a community, as a church,  
are paused, trying to keep it together on this mountaintop with the Holy,  
standing foursquare in the middle,  
wondering what is going on,  
looking back, glancing around, peering forward into the mist.  
Here we pause, in the middle, stopping to rest, to let our souls catch up,  
to pray, to connect with the holy, we discover that we are not alone.  
Here we meet the weary and wanderers,  
the helpless and hopeless,  
the holders of hope and bearers of burdens,  
the down trodden and broken hearted.

*What becomes of the broken hearted?*

A young girl named Joan Osborne in Anchorage, Kentucky had an afterschool routine.  
After school Joan and her friends went down to the local diner,  
and while her snack was prepared, she dropped a dime in the jukebox  
and punched in the same number.

As the record played, she sang along to Jimmy Ruffin belting out,  
*"What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?"*<sup>11</sup>

*As I walk this land of broken dreams  
I have visions of many things  
But happiness is just an illusion  
Filled with sadness and confusion*

*What becomes of the broken hearted  
Who had love that's now departed  
I know I've got to find  
Some kind of peace of mind...Maybe*

*The roots of love grow all around  
But for me they come a tumblin' down  
Every day heartaches grow a little stronger  
I can't stand this pain much longer*

*I walk in shadows searching for light*

*Cold and alone, no comfort in sight  
Hoping and praying for someone to care  
Always moving and going nowhere*

*What becomes of the broken hearted  
Who had love that's now departed  
I know I've got to find  
Some kind of peace of mind...Maybe*

We know, we know of what Jimmy Ruffin sang 50 years ago,  
of what Joan Osborne sang after school and later in arenas around the world,  
of what God relates to here & now,  
what the Living Christ sees and hears in our lives and  
communities.

Our hearts are broken for the schism and sadness that permeates  
the United Methodist Church after their conference last week:  
the central choice made to negate steps toward authentic hospitality;  
the subsequent hurt and shame, rejection and anger  
so many Christians now feel;  
and the uncertain future of one of the largest denominations in the world.

There are no degrees of separation here.

We stand with our Methodist friends and hold them in our prayers.

We weep with our neighbors and the family  
after the sudden death of a 17-year-old Senior at Decatur High School,  
a fine young man active in ROTC  
& local, community service projects and his church youth group.

There are no degrees of separation here.

We sit with our neighbors and hold them in our hearts.

We've been lifting up our beloved Lily Delk,  
who is in that sacred, spiritual space of "negotiating with God,"  
negotiating when she may pass over into life everlasting.  
Being the Prayer Warrior that she is, Lily is confident,  
looking forward to seeing her beloved Lyman,  
as well as her mother, who died when Lily was just a baby.

What a reunion that will be!

On Thursday we shared Holy Communion, prayed for Christ's peace,  
hugged and said our goodbyes.

She seemed so frail, so weak, her body giving way,  
yet her mind is as sharp as a tack.

When I called her daughter Cheryl on Friday,  
she said Lily was sitting up, reading the morning newspaper.

There are no degrees of separation here.

We sit in a circle of grace around her and her family,  
as well as all our loved ones in this and every time of need,

holding them, holding you and yours, in our thoughts and minds.

Being present with God and one another here in the middle,  
standing foursquare between the Law and the Prophets,  
gazing upon the radiance of Christ,  
looking back, seeing from whence we came,  
peering ahead, preparing for our departure toward Jerusalem,  
the Cross we must bear  
before the Crown we're sure to bear,  
all this would be unbearable if it were not for hope.

Hope. The hope that assures us today of God's promise of tomorrow,  
hope that is revealed by our joy.

You see, we are a "trans" people, transformed from life into life,  
transfixed from age into age, transfigured from glory into glory.

Take off your masks and let pure-D radiant joy transform the world around you.  
The Apostle Paul spoke of our own spiritual capacity to be transfigured, saying,  
*"And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord  
as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image  
from one degree of glory to another;  
for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."* --2 Cor. 3: 18

We have this joy.

*"As Christians [on the way to Jerusalem and the Cross of Jesus],  
we can laugh at death.*

*For us, death is not the joyless end of our lives.*

*Death is the beginning of endless joy.*

*Our final exit here will be our grandest entrance there."* --Barbara Johnson

This is Good News!

God's resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead  
is a beautiful chapter in our ever-unfolding story of love.

We are here in the middle of God's story, anticipating our departure, the next chapter.

Our story goes back to the start of Creation and the human family.

The story goes forward, advancing onward to the Second Advent of Christ,  
which will be the final triumph of God.

Rest assured, my friends, the final victory is assured.

Disciples of Christ pastor and teacher Beverly Gaventa teaches,

*"Although the final victory is assured, that final victory has not taken place.*

*What Easter continues to promise*

*is that not all battles have been fought and won,*

*but that God's power has assured*

*that the final victory will be God's."*

We live in confidence of the salvation that awaits us all.

With this confidence, you can live fully and completely in the moment.

Here. Now, whether ascending a mountaintop,

going down into the valley to serve,

or pausing in the middle, gaining perspective.

*"We shouldn't arrive at death's door  
all prim and proper in a pretty and well-preserved body.  
Instead, we ought to arrive breathlessly,  
skidding broadside through the pearly gates,  
thoroughly used up, totally worn out,  
loudly proclaiming, "Wow! What a ride!" --Barbara Johnson*

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

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[\[1\]](#) *"What Becomes of the Broken Hearted"* By: William Weatherspoon, Paul Riser and James Dean.