

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

February 14, 2010

Transfiguration of the Lord

Exodus 34:29-35

29Moses 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. 30When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. 31But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. 32Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; 34but 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, 35the 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 9:28-36

28Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32Now 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. 33Just 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. 34While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 36When 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.

“In Shining Glory”

There is a particular piece of artwork that has always been my favorite. When I was a child it hung over the sofa at Great Grandma Bultena’s house. Then it hung over the sofa at Aunt Elsie’s retirement

apartment. For a good number of years now—that much admired piece of artwork has hung over my sofa in my family room.

It is a piece done in chalk in the Hudson River style/school of landscape depiction. Highly influenced by romanticism the Hudson River school artwork usually had an aesthetic that balanced the use of nature—of light and darkness in such a way that it evoked a calm and serenity.

My piece of artwork was done by H.G. Bultena—he would have been my great grandfather's brother. The pieces of his artwork I have are among my most treasured possessions. I pray that they will be handed down in my family for many generations.

H.G. Bultena's primary medium was chalk. I don't know of him working in anything other than that medium. Most of his scenes depict, I believe, what may have been memories of the Hudson area and more in particular memories of life in Germany.

In the piece that hangs over my sofa there are some details that can be missed in a cursory look. In fact, there are some details that I only see occasionally. Because of the room the artwork hangs in—the natural lighting is all from the north. Consequently it is only on days when there is a significant enough snow cover that the room is really bright, bright, bright... On those days when the snow causes light to pour into the window what stands out is the tiny row boat and the coppery auburn roof of the cottage tucked into the recesses of the forest.

When the dazzling brilliance of the snow on my backyard pours light into my family room and onto my artwork—oh, it makes for a glimpse and a shine like can be seen oh so rarely. While I always see that little row boat and the cottage, on those brilliant snow days the little boat and the cottage are alive. It is on such days that one can fall into that little cottage

or recline in that minimal water vessel only to behold the brilliance of God's realm.

It is clear that H.G. Bultena saw with an eye that most of us do not see.

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James, and John, and Peter were with him. It was eight days after some significant teachings of Jesus. After those eight days, Jesus is transfigured before Peter and the sons of Thunder. I believe this to be a post-resurrection narrative that finds its way into the gospels as a foreshadowing of the glory of God that is to be revealed in Jesus.

The presence of that concept of the eighth day—the dazzling white, whiter and brighter than even the sun of this snow cover of ours—all of that along with the appearances with Moses and Elijah, it all combines to point towards resurrection and glory.

It is an exalted view of the glory of Christ. This exalted view stands as a passageway that will lead us to the season of Lent and begin our journey towards crucifixion and resurrection. That voice of God's presence—"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

This was not the first encounter with shining faces. Oh, such glory had been seen before and was long remembered.

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The stories of Moses coming down from the mountain having been face to face with God—bringing those tablets of covenant with him—oh, it caused him to shine. We are told that his face shone. He had been in the very presence of God. He had been to the holy of holies. He had been in the innermost part of the Tabernacle of all that Mt. Sinai was and he had that reflection.

The glow—the reflection—the shine—was so brilliant that it overwhelmed those who saw him—so much so that he had to hide his face with a veil.

Michelangelo's Moses—that wonderful piece of art—depicts that shining not with glow of rays but with horns. Moses has two horns in that statue. Michelangelo was working from a version of the Latin Vulgate that merged shining with horns—a display of glory.

The sheckina glory of Moses, not so well depicted by Michelangelo—oh, that glory shines through. That veil that Moses wore—it may have lessened the fear they had at the awesome transformation/transfiguration of Moses after being in the presence of God. Yes, it may have lessened their fear, but it did not remove the glory. It did not remove the shining glow.

Its that same glow that Peter and James and John saw in the appearance of Jesus, and Moses, and Elijah on that occasion of Transfiguration. That glow, which is a reflection of the direct contact and relationship with God, was brilliant. It leapt off the canvas.

Here is the incredible news! We have that same appearance! Yes! This transfiguration is not only an event of long ago but is a signpost of what it means to be living out this reality of a relationship with God.

The stark reality and incredible reality is you are not a casual observer—you are a central player. Let me put it this way—you are in the spotlight. You are that amazing piece of artwork with the snow glow on

you. You glow!! And that glow of yours is a sign, seal, and symbol that the presence of God is about you and with you.

Too often we not only do not see our glow, but we do not claim it. Too often we are more like Moses—we do not want to freak anybody out or stand out in the crowd so we wear the veil. It is not a veil over our face, but it is veil over our lives. We wear that veil.

It is the veil of keeping this relationship with God a secret. It's the veil of chiming in when the negative talk rather than challenging it with a firm belief that God will bring about a resurrection. It's the veil of accepting the way the world tells us how things work—that power is money and power is powerful.

We wear that veil and we wear it well. Too well.

I say wait. Stop. Open yourself. You shine with the presence and hope of God! Let that shine! And if you are thinking that you do not shine very much—well than allow God to turn up your light. Yes, for sure—allow God to intensify your light.

As that happens, realize what comes to the fore. Realize what comes to the fore.

What is in the fore of your life? What is in the front? What is in the center? What is your core that makes you YOU? What is in you that defines you, shapes you, moves you—holds you, has you.... What is it?

Notice what happens there on the mountain of transfiguration—as those three watch the great scene unfold. There they are the three greats

of the faith—and what does God do—but has Moses and Elijah disappear—who remains—who, as I call it, takes the fore?

Yes, Jesus does.

Do you see that is what is shining—the shekina glory in you—letting it come out of you and it shining through you is all about letting him come to the fore of our lives. As long as we still only allow him in when it is convenient or when it fits our schedule or idea—that does not work. It doesn't shine.

When we allow God in—when we let Jesus have that place of center—when he is our energy source and our light—oh then it is clear that the shine of our lives is not about me and it is not about you—but it is about this wonderful God in Jesus Christ that lives in and through us.

That is your fore.

The message is clear—that Peter and James and John, and the whole of Israel camped at Mt. Sinai—they were not clear about the message. They were not sure about what it spoke. They were more startled and put off by the glow than they were welcoming of it.

But the message is clear—and the meaning of it is clear—and we are to both receive it and shine it. We are both to allow it in and share it out. What is the message?

Oh, it is so clear—and there was this voice that said—“This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him!”

God is moving towards us all the time. It is not that we have to earn our way in or be good enough or do enough. No. God is taking the

initiative here. God is the one opening up and letting us hear—we are God's own—we are God's own!

We hear it in the gracious words of our Savior—"this is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you. Do this."

God is moving toward us all the time and the message is clear—we are God's own.

You see just like that dazzling white appearance there on the mountaintop—just like that we are in the presence of God. And we shine that presence. Look. Shine. Let it be seen.

It is like that sweet piece of artwork hanging there in my family room. In the bright dazzling glow of snow reflection I can see so clearly what is there all the time. I can see that tiny boat and that wonderful cottage so noticeably—ah it carries me away. When the brightness in the room is not so bright—guess what? That little cottage and tiny boat are still there.

They are still there.

And so is your shine—in the shining glory of God you are a reflection of God's wonderful presence. Just when you do not think you have it—listen to the message—you are God's own—chosen. And hearing that message—oh, let that light out. Let that light of Christ both shine in you and shine out of YOU!!

No veil needed. Drop the veil. Let that shekinah glory of Christ in you shine through. Christ in you—you are this incredible piece of artwork—let that shine through so that it changes lives and grows God's love. Amen.