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BLAINE

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Turn us towards your radiant face Lord. Unstop our ears, calm our minds, and settle our troubled hearts. But somehow, Lord, get our attention. So that we will see your smile, know your heart, and truly fathom the depths of your love! In Jesus' Name we ask this, Amen.

“PIERCING THE VIEL”

At an Elder's meeting this week, Sarah Esper shared an excerpt from Sunday School as a devotional. “Suppose that you are an “extra” in an upcoming movie. (You know, one of those momentary parts, where you are in a crowd, in the background, as the camera flashes past). You will probably scrutinize that one scene, where hundreds of people are milling around, just waiting for that two-fifths of a second when you can see the back of your head! Maybe your parents and closest friends will get excited about that two-fifths of a second with you too? Maybe? But no one else will even realize it is you. Even if you tell them, they won't care! ...How could you possibly think that movie is about you?”

Today is Transfiguration Sunday! Today we wrap up the season of Epiphany! Today we are given a glimpse of God, the whole point and focus of the movie! A few others in our texts are given the very same thing. So, I wonder, if we might see ourselves?

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus goes up onto a mountain and stands in the Presence of God! There, His appearance is changed, and His true identity revealed! The Disciples look on with awe, and Peter tries to find something to do! And in our Old Testament lesson, roughly nine hundred years earlier, Elisha watches as Elijah is taken up into heaven! Swept up in a whirlwind, by the way, riding in a chariot made out of fire!

What would you do if you were there, in either of these instances? These are Epiphanies, right—Aha Moments, times when the Presence of God is dramatically revealed, times when the star of the movie is made abundantly clear! What would that be like? What would it be like to momentarily pierce the veil between Heaven and Earth, to stand in the Presence of God? Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever personally touched the Divine, experienced the Lord’s majesty and awe, first hand? And how, pray tell, does one respond to an experience like that?

Elisha watched as Elijah rolled up his cloak and struck the waters of the Jordan, parting them to the left and the right, just like Moses did at the Red Sea! Then this Prophetic Protege watched, along with fifty other Prophets, as Elijah was taken up into Glory! What do you do with that? It says that Elisha tore his clothes, presumably in grief over the loss of his mentor. But then, it says, “Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak”, the very one Elijah had used to part the waters, and then did the very same thing! Does that address the question maybe? If you have seen the Glory of God, or witnessed that Glory in someone else, does following after them make sense?

Jesus took Peter, and John, and James up onto a mountain to pray. These Disciples were among the very first called, remember, the same three Jesus took with Him into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, who while there, fell asleep. Imagine that experience on the mountaintop! Right in front of them, their mentor is changed! He becomes radiant! “His clothes become dazzling white,” it says, “whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them!” Then Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah, face-to-face, two long-time biblical greats! After which a loud, booming voice comes thundering out of a cloud, proclaiming just who Jesus really is! “This is my Son,” says God! “Listen to Him!”

Again, if you were a Jesus Follower, what would you do with that?

Moments like these are full of awe and wonder, aren't they! I have heard them described as “Wizard of OZ” moments! We mere mortals stand in the Gothic hallways of the Emerald City, and are greeted with an explosion, great billows of smoke! And a giant, disembodied, sometimes menacing voice, echoes, “I am OZ, the great and terrible! Who are you?” ...So, what do you do?

I don't know if I like the analogy or not. But it does create a word picture. And like Dorothy, we may attempt to respond, only to be silenced! Or like the Tin Man and Scarecrow, we might approach with caution, or trepidation, wondering if the gifts that we seek might be bestowed upon us! Or like the Cowardly Lion, it might take everything we've got to simply not faint with fear! These are truly awe-filled moments, moments when Almighty God reaches through the veil separating us!

I know some of you have had moments like these. Maybe all of you have? Your spirit was touched by God's Spirit! You experienced Holiness! You were given a glimpse of the Majesty of God, witnessed the Divine! But then, what do you do with that? It is not about the moment. It's about all that follows. Remember, the movie is not about you!

It can be scary, I know! And maybe it should be! Maybe like Isaiah or Jeremiah, your knees begin to knock, and you want to cry out, "I am just a child Lord"! "I don't know how to speak!" "Woe is me! I am ruined! I am a man or woman of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips! And yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!" Many turn inward at times like these, like an "extra" in a movie. The focus is turned solely on them self! At least at first. But then, over time, as the smoke clears and the dust settles, you realize that moment was an Epiphany! Slowly you become aware of the Presence of God!

So, how often does that happen to you? In an average week, or on an average day, how often do you become aware of the Presence of God? How many times do you set aside all those distractions around you, stop, and turn your eyes towards Heaven? I'm going to assume that happens at prayer, and that you do that often! Hopefully it happens during Worship, and that you do that each and every week! But in addition to those times—and apart from all the fearful times, when life has backed you into a corner, and you turn to God as a last resort—apart from that, how God-aware do you think you really are? ...And if that doesn't make you stop and think, how God-aware are the people around you, based on what they see in you?

Think back to our children's moment this morning. If God is bigger than you are—which is a definite “Yeah”! And if the Spirit of God resides in your heart after you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, a clear biblical promise! Then shouldn't the Spirit of the Lord shine through? ...What is it that people see in you?

What I'm asking is, once you've experienced it, once you've noticed, how do you respond to the majesty of God? The Apostle Paul, a converted sinner, a persecutor of Christians in the early church, offers a few suggestions in his letter to the Galatians. So, we should ourselves if, love and joy and peace and patience, radiate from my very being! Are kindness and goodness and faithfulness freely flowing from our hearts, or at a minimum, seeping out around the edges? Are gentleness and self-control pouring forth? And if not, then why?

Do people see your faith twinkling in your eyes, or dancing in your smile? Or do they have to search deeply, just find a spark? Does our body language, especially that wagging tongue of ours, reflect the Holy Spirit within, or are we mirroring something else entirely? ...In short, does the Presence of God within you, weave together with your presence in the world, creating a radiant beam of hope that pierces the darkness?

Peter, James, and John went with Jesus up onto a mountain to pray. And there, filled with the Holy Spirit, the Glory of God shines through Him! And in that instant the Veil obscuring our Lord's true identity is pulled aside! Who He is, and Whose He is, is clearly revealed!

The curtain of doubt for Peter and the boys is suddenly withdrawn—briefly maybe—but in an extraordinary way! Physically, Jesus’ clothes become shimmering white, more amazing than we could ever explain! Spiritually, His true nature is revealed! A powerful, commanding voice declares from Heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love! Listen to Him!” And it is the same voice, mind you, saying the very same thing that it did at Jesus’ Baptism! “This is my Son, whom I love! Listen to Him!”

For most of us, that would have been enough to get our attention, don’t you think! I know it would have been for me! But then, like Theological Icing on an Ontological Cake, two of the greatest religious figures of all time appear on the stage! And Peter, in shock maybe, most certainly in awe, starts stumbling over his words, probably like we might do, “Lord, should I set up a few tents? I sure am glad that we were here!”

Remember, these are good Jewish boys. They would have known the Scriptures, well! The implications then, would have been clear! Moses is the great Law-Giver, who took three people with him up on Mt. Sinai to get the Commandments. There, God spoke to him from a cloud, and Moses’ face became radiant from this encounter with God! In fact, after meeting with God, he had to wear a veil! A grand drama is unfolding before them! One clearly designed to point to the Almighty!

With him though, is Elijah, arguably one of the greatest Prophets of all-time! Standing right in front of them, as Jesus is Transfigured, are the very cornerstones of their faith, The Law and The Prophets!

So, if you were there, on that stage—or as you stand on a smaller one maybe, cast as an “extra” in the movie—what role do you play? You are at the Gates of the Emerald City! You’ve seen waters parted, and the Glory of God shining on Jesus’ face! You have mentors and leaders and teachers that have shone you the way! Now, what is your role in the Grand Drama?

Are you a star, a “Voice of Proclamation”, echoing the voice that rains down from Heaven? Are you a Moses, or an Elijah, espousing the Law, or sharing Prophecy? Are you more like one of the Disciples—a Tin Man or a Scarecrow—frightened by the magnitude of what you see, yet willing to step up anyway? Maybe you’re ready to faint even, like the Cowardly Lion, but you don’t? Maybe you’re like Peter—a bit confused right now, but feeling as if you need to do something! Tell me, Rabbi, what should I do next?

Can you relate to any of these biblical heroes? I mean you’ve spent time in the wilderness, right? You have helped point others to the Lord? You’ve been a leader at times, and a follower at others? You’ve shown folks the lay of the land, helped guide others on the journey? You’ve been there, stood where Jesus is standing, at least momentarily and metaphorically! You have been dramatically changed by the Presence of Almighty God, right! Something powerful happened between you and The Lord! And now that transformation clearly shows, right!

You know, I find the exchange between Peter and Jesus interesting, or maybe telling. Six days prior to the mountaintop, Peter realizes the truth, and makes what we call “The Good Confession”. He publicly proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God! But now, in the midst of all that’s happening, Peter calls Jesus Rabbi, Teacher, instead of Lord! Why is that? Could it imply that Divine Revelation sometimes is a process, one where we might slip backwards at times?

And I love the exchange between Elijah and Elisha too! Elijah asks his protégée what he can do for him before he is taken away. And Elisha, like the eldest son in any Jewish family, asks for a double portion as his inheritance. He wants to do what Elijah did, and be who Elijah is! He doesn’t want twice as much stuff. He wants to be Elijah’s heir! “I want to carry on the family name,” he says, in essence! “I want to carry your mantle, to be your legacy when you’re gone!” ...God’s movie includes “Equipping the Saints”, doesn’t it! But also, a clear mandate for us to take on our role in the drama with gusto!

So, here’s the thing, at least for me! Here is my question to you, as well as to myself. Do my encounters with the Lord radiate on my face? Do my moments in the Presence show? Since I’ve been confronted by the Glory of God, have seen the Veil of Heaven momentarily pierced, pulled aside—am I witnessing to that experience with my presence in the world? I know I don’t need to wear a veil, like Moses did after encountering the Lord. But if God is bigger than me, and living within me, then shouldn’t it show? And all of God’s people said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Reveal yourself to us Lord! Help us to notice your Glory. It surrounds us Lord. We see it in the sparkling tree branch encased in ice, and notice it in the pastel sky as the sun says its final goodnight. We hear it in a newborn's cry, and smell it on a warm spring morning. And we sense it here, Lord, in your house of worship, among your people, as we gather together for prayer. But open our eyes even wider, please.

Thank you for being the Lord of our lives! Thank you for reaching out to us, even when we don't think we need a hand. And thank you for your promise of salvation, through your Son, Jesus Christ. That revelation alone brings us to our knees! So, Lord, we entrust all that we do, and all that we are, and all that we will ever become, into your loving care with that promise. We open up ourselves, our lives and our hearts, willingly right now, placing our future into your hands. We also place the lives of our loved ones into your compassionate arms Lord, for we know of your grace, we have seen your love, and we are aware of your great desire to heal! Father, please bless those who we have been praying for these past few weeks. And please touch each person whose name is on our prayer list today in a powerful way! Shower them with your love Lord, and your peace, and your joy. Pour it out on all whose troubles are on our minds this morning—on each of those whose health, and safety, and welfare are tugging at our hearts right now—and on those we are not even aware of. And please, Lord, rejoice with those who are rejoicing today, for you are the God of all things! Father, we especially ask for your Presence with Pour out your grace on each of these lives lifted before you today, upon this church Lord, and upon your world. We ask this in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and pray together now the very prayer that He has taught us saying, Our Father...