

The Rev. Joan M. Kilian

Trinity Episcopal Church

Exodus 34: 29 – 35 Psalm 99: 5 – 9
2 Peter 1: 13 – 21 Luke 9: 28 – 36

Some of you may have heard me tell this story before, but it seems so apropos. A number of years ago, I was privileged to visit Winchester Cathedral in England. One of the most unique features of the cathedral is the great west window. The window is above the main entrance into the cathedral and it is enormous – actually consisting of 48 separate window panels. What is so unique about it is how it looks very modern and very old at the same time. The reason it looks so modern is because of the abstract pattern of the pieces of stained glass.

When the window was created in the 14th century, the designers and craftsmen didn't start out to be abstract – in fact, they couldn't have conceived of the idea. Originally, all 48 panels depicted various saints or prophets or people from the Bible or English history. However, when Cromwell ransacked Winchester in the civil war of 1642, he rode his troops into the cathedral on horseback and ordered that every window be broken. And they were. All of the beauty, all of the craftsmanship, was destroyed. But then, an interesting thing happened.

The people from the town of Winchester, when they knew it was safe to come out from wherever they were hiding, came and gathered up every fragment of colored glass they could find. On the stone floor, on the grounds. Anything large enough to pick up was saved. When the monarchy was restored in 1660, the huge window was rebuilt from all the 14th century glass. Only, so much had been lost, and no one could quite recall what any of the windows looked like, and so they were put back together randomly. The result is an almost Mondrian-like abstraction of colors and shapes, but still, a window of great beauty and great triumph. [If you are curious about what the window looks like, you can go to <http://www.beenthere-donethat.org.uk/hampshire/winchestercathedral3.html>] The window has a lot to say about grace and redemption and how we see the world.

There is another, similar, story that is much more contemporary. In the West Bank of the Palestine, Bethlehem, there are always signs of conflict: piles of rubble where homes and businesses have been bulldozed; pock-marked walls where bullets and shells have left their signature; barbed wire dividing people; broken glass shards littering practically every street and sidewalk. But just like those villagers of Winchester who crept out to gather the bits and pieces of their beautiful window, some Palestinian women fearlessly leave the relative security of their homes and go out and carefully pick up shards of glass. They bring them to art studios sponsored by the Lutheran Church and here, the bits and pieces of glass - colored and clear, wavy and flat - are transformed into pieces of art: angels, crosses, nativity scenes. The shards, fragments of destruction and evil, are remade into symbols of hope and transformation [www.annadwa.org]. These transfigured pieces of glass catch the sun and reflect a little bit of God's glory.

Today's lessons are, of course, about those same sort of transforming, transfiguring experiences. In the lesson from Exodus, we hear about how Moses' face glows more and more after each encounter with God. So much so that the people of Israel can hardly stand to look at Moses, and so, while he meets with *God* face to face, he veils his face when he is with the *people*. Peter's letter refers to his personal experience on the mountaintop with Jesus, what we hear about secondhand from the evangelist, Luke, today. The Transfiguration is a time of almost overwhelming revelation and glory. In hindsight, they will know this as the experience that gives them the strength to make it through the

events in Jerusalem, and that gives them the insight to acknowledge the resurrection. But it is incomprehensible as it happens. Jesus appears completely radiant, glowing from head to toe with a power that emanates from him. In this moment, he is both glorified by God and he glorifies God. Joining him are Moses and Elijah. As author Madeleine L'Engle writes, God, in bringing the three of them together, 'breaks ordinary chronology into a million fragments.' Not unlike the millions of shards on the cathedral floor, or on the sidewalks and streets of Palestine.

Perhaps all these passages are reminders that ultimately, God is about gathering together all the shards of this broken world and putting us, like Humpty Dumpty, back together again. It doesn't happen according to our timetable, but according to God's. Bit by bit, piece by piece, God is about transforming brokenness into wholeness. God is about reconfiguring and redeeming all that is wrong in the world and in our lives and making it right again. That doesn't mean it will be exactly the same as before it was broken. Remember the scars on Jesus' hands after the resurrection? The window in Winchester is a beautiful window again, and the little glass angels and crosses are lovely suncatchers. But all of them, by their very nature, are very visible symbols of a shattered world that has been made wholly new, wholly hopeful, wholly redeemed, scars and all. And they all, in the process of being transfigured and transformed, reflect God's glory.

So often we wonder what really happens at the Transfiguration – which of course is something we can ponder 'til the cows home, because we don't really know. It is something beyond our understanding, beyond the bounds of reason. Madeleine L'Engle, again, describes it as "Strong stuff. Mythic stuff. That stuff which makes life worth living, which lies on the other side of provable fact." The Rev. Rick Morley would agree. He points out that God's presence, just as in the Moses story, is made manifest in a cloud. And clouds, Morley says, don't clarify, they obscure. They remind us of the mystery of God. We human beings want to know, and we want to know right now. But a relationship with God isn't that easy. God, Morley says, isn't composed of a series of facts, easily digestible and readily relatable.

So perhaps what is happening at the Transfiguration has as much to do with how the *disciples see things* as with *what God is doing*. How many times does Jesus say "Let those with eyes see and those with ears hear!"? Maybe the Transfiguration is as much about what the disciples are looking for and therefore what they are able to see. Maybe, transfiguration is in the eye of the beholder.

Gregory of Nyssa, one of the 4th century church fathers, wrote that anyone with their eyes on 'the head and origin of the whole universe' has them on virtue and truth. In other words, seeing isn't believing, rather believing is seeing. If we keep our focus on Jesus, then maybe transfigurations are more common than we suppose. Even if we aren't privileged to be on that mountaintop with Jesus and his chosen disciples, the way of transfiguration, the way of seeing through the eyes of God, can be our way of seeing, too. It is by looking with eyes that expect and believe in God's transfiguring power that we see Kingdom relationships, Kingdom behavior, Kingdom transformations to be the stuff of reality in this world. The French poet, Paul Eluard, wrote, "There is another world, but it is in this one." It's what Jesus means when he says, "The Kingdom of God is all around you." And it is, if we have eyes fit for the task.

With the eyes of transfiguration, we can see world-size things – things like South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, like the IRA's abandonment of terrorist tactics, like the fall of the Berlin Wall, like the surge of relief in the wake of massive hurricanes and tsunamis, the Parish Climate Accord for the environment, worldwide responses of grief and support following terrorist attacks, the

welcoming of refugees by so many countries – we can see these things as moments of transfigurations. Moments that glorify God. But also with the eyes of transfiguration, we can see every-day-size things – things like Habitat homes, like needy children with armloads of school supplies, like people from this diocese and the Dominican Republic building decent places to worship, to learn and to play; like people being fed by Rebecca's Café and donations to the Food Bank – we can see these as little moments of transfiguration. With the eyes of transfiguration, we can even look into our own lives and see the hope that our friend's smile gives us, the hug that we gave to someone with whom we had been angry, the thing which we used to hate about ourselves but now at least accept if not embrace - we can see all these as little shards, brief moments of transfiguration, coming together for wholeness.

The disciples' mountaintop experience of the Transfiguration - even if it isn't clear to them at that moment – points to the real, the whole, the Truth in a world that distorts and obscures and shatters Truth, wholeness and reality. It is a moment when the Kingdom of God shines forth in all its glory, breaking through the limitations and dimness of this world to show us what life is really about. The Transfiguration shines the light of hope beyond the fragmentation, the partialness, the painfulness of *now*, and it illuminates how all will be made new and right and good in God. In the Transfiguration, we see things not as we have *always* seen them, but as we shall *one day* see them. The Transfiguration is the extraordinary shining through the ordinary, the divine shining through the human, the “will be” shining through the “is.”

Let us pray. Glorious God, thank you for those moments that transcend all the limitations of our world and ourselves. Thank you for those things that give us the strength and the vision we need to persevere when we are not on a mountaintop. Thank you for your promised wholeness and redemption. Give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear your glory in *this* world, knowing that one day, it will be *all* that we know. In Christ's name. Amen.

+