

The Spiritual Blind side

The Transfiguration of our Lord

Texts: Exodus 34:29-35

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 (Series C. Transfiguration of Our Lord) Ps. 22

Luke 9:28-36 (37-43a)

Jesus took Peter, John, and James with him and went up a hill to pray. While he was praying, his face changed its appearance, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly two men were there talking with him. They were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in heavenly glory and talked with Jesus....

Let us pray:

During my seminary training, one of the text books on New Testament Theology was written by Rudolph Bultmann. Rudolph Bultmann a New Testament scholar wrote in the early 1940s, *"It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles (These are) unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world"*.

In view of today's advanced technology what are we to say about today's Gospel reading of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Is this just one of those events in the life of Jesus that Bultmann would say is *"unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world"*?

As I say this, I'm aware that this was way outside the experience of those who witnessed these events. Peter was so impressed he wanted the experience to continue indefinitely So, my friends what do we make with funny stories in the Bible that take us beyond our own humans experiences such as:

- Such as talking snake,
- like raising people from the dead,
- the miraculous healing of lepers and epileptics,
- Walking water, feeding 5,000 people with five loath of bread and two Norwegian sardines,

- giving people back their sight and hearing,
- enabling people who are helplessly paralysed to walk again,
- and today we heard about the dazzling appearance of Jesus as he talked with two Old Testament heroes – Moses and Elijah?

Was Bultmann right when he said that these are "*unintelligible and unacceptable* to the modern world" and it is no longer possible to "*believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles*"? (I ask myself..... - were the miracles any more understandable in Jesus' time?)

In the early hours in the morning about thirteen years ago I was called to the hospital in Montreal by the family of a dying woman. A wife, mother, and grand mother had fallen into a deep coma, relying on life support to keep her alive. Her colour was pale, her feet swollen and blue death was eminent, so I thought.

The family was upset of course, as we stood around the bed the daughter of the dying woman asked if you could give her the last rite which I did. Right after my prayer, the grand daughter prayed: praying something like, "God, if it be your will, restore my grandmother to health, please God let her know that we all love her. Amen.

Shortly, thereafter a short meeting was held with the family, the doctor and a couple of nurses and I was invited to sit in. The doctor explained to the family with love and compassion that they have done every thing medically possible and she hasn't responded therefore they were asking the family's permission turn off the machine.

The grand daughter requested if they could wait for few days as it is God who gives life and ends life. I visited this patient each day, about the fifth day I was amazed to see her sitting up in her bed eating jello by herself, remember I gave her the last rite. In due course she became strong enough to go home. She lived for 12 years, she died last year at the age of 97yrs.

Some would say it was "good luck" that is fine. Others might say that it was a coincidence that too is ok. But with the eyes of faith we can say that God's hand was in her healing.

Was that just "good luck"? A chance? Or was it one of God's miracles? Or was it a combination of medicine and prayer of faith, you name it that brought her healing? Well! I will leave that to you to decide. I know what I believe.

A teacher was doing her best to discredit the miracles of the Bible. She said, "Take, for instance, the crossing of the *Red Sea*. We know this body of water was only 6 inches deep".

Immediately from the back of the class room came the remark, "*Praise God for the miracle!*" The teacher annoyed, and asked, "*What miracle?*" "Well," explained the boy, "God must have drowned the whole Egyptian army in just 6 inches of water!"

When it comes to the *unexplainable* in our Christian faith, like miracles, we are tempted to reduce our faith to what is *rational* and *understandable*. We feel that modern people just don't accept what is incomprehensible.

Listen to this. "If we think that we can be Christians and deny the miraculous, we are mistaken". To deny *miracles* is to deny the very essence of the Christian faith, our very being in Christ and faith in our selves.

This is why – the very fact that we are children of God is miracle. In fact, as wonderful as being healed of a sickness or rescued from a tragedy might be, this is a far greater miracle. To be saved from the judgement to come.

Martin Luther in the Small Catechism he explained the work of the Holy Spirit he said, "*I believe that on my own I can never come to Jesus Christ my Lord, or believe in him, no matter how hard I try. But the Holy Spirit called me to faith.*"*

This is the miracle of faith. Our relationship with God, our knowledge and trust, faith that believes that Jesus died *for me*, that he rose from the dead *for me*, is only possible through the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

It is impossible for any of us to create faith in God. We can't do anything to improve our relationship with God because we are so bound up in ourselves – even our best and noblest desires are affected by sin and there is nothing that we can do about it.

The 13th century Italian *theologian Thomas Aquinas* considered this miraculous moment as the greatest of the miracles of Jesus as it corresponds to the five most significant events in his life, the other four being: *Baptism, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension*.

It was at this moment, the Transfiguration of Christ, at the top of the mountain, that Human and Divine meet, when Jesus is the connector between heaven and earth, when the temporal and eternal spark a dazzling display of transcendent Majestic Glory, all in the sight of the chosen disciples who then bear witness to the prophecy confirmed.

It was only a few weeks ago we birthed him, baptized him, and heard him preaching in parables, and challenging the conventional norms. Now, already, Moses and Elijah speak of his *departure* from his human existence. We are about to enter a time of *reflection, faith exploration*, choosing between repentance and following Jesus or taking the easier way out. Lent is upon us.

Let us choose to *listen*. And if we open ourselves to knowing it again, differently. It will be a new beginning for our journey to our own *transfiguration* and *transformation* as true listeners and followers of Jesus our Redeemer.

As we listen to God through his Word –The Holy Spirit creates in us the miracle of faith. This is not just a once only miracle – but a miracle that God does every day, even when you and I doubt that God even cares for us.

My life has changed for God to make that kind of promise to a sinful person like me is an amazing miracle. So, we come back to the mountaintop experiences of the disciples – the dazzling clothes, the appearance of Moses and Elijah and the booming voice from heaven, - this may not be a common occurrence in our lives.

But far more important and far more impressive is the miracle of *forgiveness* and a *renewed relationship* with God through Jesus in the here and now experience.

Wednesday is the beginning of Lent, the season of the Cross. We shall begin a Lenten journey a walk with Jesus down the narrow way of obedience, a way which leads to Good Friday to pain, suffering and death.

When we walk out the doors of this church, the world may not look as pretty or sound as glorious as it does in here. It will be an ordinary, rather drab, 19th of February 2023 out there, down there in the valley, with nothing visibly different from when we came in.

But you see, my friends you and I will be different. Yes! We will be different, having seen the future, God's future, having again heard the word that keeps us going until our next glimpse of eternity: "*This is my son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!*"

These particular kinds of clouds in which God is present, are known in Judaism as the Shekinah ~ a feminine Hebrew word for a name of God. It also translates to "settling or dwelling of the Divine Presence."

The miracles recorded in the New Testament changed people's lives, to the point they willing to die for it. It did for me personally in 1969! Even to a greater degree the miracle of faith changes our lives and sets us on our way to serve. The holy and loving God claims us we are to be a light and the salt of this world.

And as we come together as a community of faith at this Eucharistic table to be nourished, empowered by God's very presence, the Shekinah God whispers your name and says you are my beloved child, *Do not be afraid*. Now that's a miracle! **Amen.**

