Transfiguration - Miracles Reveal: Transformation

Psalm 121 Kimby Young

Mark 9:2-9 February 11, 2018

When I was in seminary, a million years ago, I remember a discussion about the nature of God. What is God like? I immediately think of words like loving, powerful, generous, gracious, awesome, holy, mysterious, good, infinite, eternal. You get the idea. You probably have the same kind of descriptions rolling around in your head. How do you describe God? In this discussion, we started talking about the “opposites” in God’s nature – like just and merciful, loving and powerful, trinity and unity, and so on. Because it was seminary, someone had to show off and use big words. So I first heard the words “imminent” and “transcendent” to describe God. I printed these words in the bulletin at the point of the sermon. Back in that day, I didn’t know what these words mean, so don’t feel bad if you don’t. Does anybody know? “imminent” and “transcendent”.

If you are in imminent danger – that means something is about to happen, you are very close to danger. So “imminent” in describing God means that God is so close, it is indescribable. God is so near that God is almost the same as you and yet distinct. God is so very personal and relevant and connected that you can’t imagine life apart from God. There is no separation. That is God as imminent.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is “transcendent.” Webster’s describes transcendent as surpassing or exceeding all usual limits, extending beyond all possible ordinary experience and knowledge, outside of our material existence. In describing God, transcendent means God is wholly and completely other than human. God is out there somewhere in the unknowable.

So these two concepts are opposites - “imminent” close and personal - and “transcendent” out there and unreachable. And so the question becomes how can these two opposites in God’s nature both be true and at the same time. Because they are. God is so close to you – that God is described as breath – the very air we breathe. And yet God is so far from us that we can never ever fully grasp all that God is. God cares personally for you. God cares about every little detail of your life. Yet God is Creator of the Universe, and greater than we can imagine. That is the mystery of the divine. God is absolutely indescribable and far from us, while at the same time intimately connected to each one of us, loving every single one of us.

Today’s story of the transfiguration is one of those stories we can’t quite grasp. Jesus went up on a mountain with his closest disciples, and something mysterious and miraculous happened.

We’re not even sure what happened or how – bright lights, blazing colors, mysterious figures, unusual revelations, a voice from heaven. We really don’t understand the event. Jesus who was fully human, was also at the same time visibly divine. Heavenly figures appeared with Jesus to indicate that Jesus was the fulfillment of faith – of all that had gone before and all that was yet to be. Jesus was transfigured, transformed. His physical form changed for a moment into a spiritual presence – the very presence of God in visible form. I can’t imagine what the disciples were thinking.

This miracle of transfiguration reminds us that transformation of any kind, is mysterious and miraculous. Change doesn’t usually happen in a flash of light or a spiritual revelation. Change usually happens slowly over time and with a lot of energy invested. But even then, change, transformation, is miraculous. When we try to change ourselves, our habits, our practices, our values, our way of being. It takes great effort. It takes time and practice. It may require some mistakes or failures. It takes will power and determination. Frankly, sometimes, for some important changes we try to make in our lives, it requires the presence and power of God, the intervention of God. I don’t know if you’ve ever tried to make that kind of fundamental change in your life – but it is hard. And if you succeed it feels miraculous, it feels like a gift from God.

This church is in the midst of this kind of fundamental transformation. We are thinking about what needs to change and what needs to remain the same, for us to be all that God is calling us to be. If we are called to grow spiritually, to grow as a church, what kind of transformation will God work among us? What kind of changes do we need to make? What kind of miracles might we expect? Well, that’s the thing about miracles – you don’t really see them coming. You don’t really know what God is doing – until you are right in the middle of the miracle.

I believe God is working miracles among us right now. I believe God is calling us to be greater than ourselves, greater than what we have been. I believe God is calling us to reach out into the city of Gardner and find those people who need to know God’s love. I believe God is calling us to BE God’s love in the world, so that people around us, will encounter God, and know God, and experience the love of God here and now. I believe God is calling us – individually and as a church – to tell people about Jesus, and to help people find God.

I believe God is calling us to welcome strangers into our church and to reach out beyond these walls in new ways and transformative ways. I believe God is calling First Presbyterian Church to be a light to the city and a hope for the hurting. I believe God is calling us to be transformed that we might help God transform lives. I believe God is working a miracle among us. And I don’t know what that miracle will look like. I don’t know what that transformation will require of us. I don’t know what you might personally be called to change. But I believe. I believe God is moving among us and if we let God move, if we let the Spirit of God pour through us – then we will be transformed. We will be transfigured into the likeness of Christ in the world.

I don’t know if we’re ready for that. Are we ready for God’s miracle of grace? I don’t know.

But I pray. I believe. I hope. I dream. To the glory of God I pray.