

Letting the Glory Out  
Hope Central Church  
Year A, Transfiguration, 3/2/14  
Rev. Laura Ruth Jarrett

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain to be alone with them. And before their eyes, Jesus was transfigured—his face becoming as dazzling as the sun and his clothes as radiant as light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said, “Rabbi, how good that we are here! with your permission i will erect three shelters here—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!” Peter was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. Out of the cloud came a voice which said, “This is my own, my beloved, on whom my favor rests. Listen to him!” When they heard this, the disciples fell forward on the ground, overcome with fear. Jesus came toward them and touched them, saying, “Get up! Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they did not see anyone but Jesus. As they were coming down the mountainside, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone about this until the chosen One has risen from the dead.”

There are many things going on at Hope Central. I wonder if your heads are spinning. We’re renewing our capital campaign, we’re 43% to our goal of 400K for the furnace. We’re beginning the process of searching for our first Associate Pastor. In May, we’ll be saying goodbye to Courtney as our student minister, and in June, goodbye to Lee as Director of Children’s Spiritual Formation. Also in June, we’ll say goodbye to our big old continent of a furnace. The construction for installing our new furnace will begin and our lives will be ass over teakettle for about two or three months.

If there is one thing our congregation is, it is dynamic. You know what I mean? I mean we have **not** decided for ourselves that we are going to find a hole in the pegboard of spiritual practice or Christian congregations and put a plug in it, and there rest, then rot.

No, it seems that what we’re doing and we may continue to do and be is a dynamic congregation. Our mission statement reflects that dynamism - it has a lot of verbs in it, **seeking** ultimate meaning, **moving** toward the heart of God **contributing** to the repair of the world - gerund after gerund, lots of -ing language.

At a Leadership Circle meeting some months ago, during our devotion which always proceeds our business, I asked the members of the Leadership Circle what were the gerunds, you know the words that end with –ing, that describe their lives and also the life of our congregation. They said we are a teaching,

coaching, training, merging, adopting, healing, grieving, parenting, recovering, leading, driving, learning, doctoring, cooking, tending, looking and seeking, waiting, sitting people. That's a lot of activity for us. Even "waiting" and "sitting" when included inside this list, seem like activities.

Ours isn't a congregation, except for a brief time when I first arrived in June, 2010 when everybody was really tired, that we stood still. Maybe we were resting.

Since I've been here at the church, we've **not** decided that we should be a static thing, a non-dynamic thing, maybe, like a country club or a china dish too precious to be used at the dinner table.

I think somehow, we've decided to be congregation open to seeing and noticing how God is moving among us.

Here at church, it seems we are paying attention to Spirit's moving between us, longing to be diving into the deep, and following, listening, becoming. Really, I think we have a lot of audacity, the audacity that might come from Hope. I think we are quite bodacious!

The last three weeks in the lectionary, and we've been preaching out of the lectionary in the morning service, we have been lingering on the Mount of the Beatitudes for the Sermon on the Mount, listening to Jesus teaching, but today, we have shot forward like a cannonball in our lectionary story from Matthew 5-7 to Matthew 17, to the event of Transfiguration because Lent is beginning, and we need to get ready. What we're missing as we're flying by in the in Jesus' story of the Sermon on the Mount the last several Sundays and this Transfiguration Sunday is that Jesus has been recruiting disciples by touching their hearts, minds and souls, and they've been healing, gaining confidence, casting out spirits. And here, this Sunday, as we prepare for Lent, we have Jesus transfiguring. That is, we are seeing him, through the eyes of Peter, James and John, becoming who he is becoming - and we know - this is the meaning of God's name. When Moses met God at the burning bush, Moses asks for God's name, God said, I am who I am becoming. Jesus in our story is doing this, becoming what he's becoming.

What Jesus is becoming is an interesting question – that whole field of Christology, that is, the field of what we say about Jesus or Christ, is a quick side note to this sermon. When I was a girl in the white working class church I grew up, Jesus was becoming a solid middle class citizen. In the black Baptist church, Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, in the town where I went to college, a place I was kindly welcomed over and over, Jesus was the new Moses and was liberating the people in Athens, Georgia, where Jim Crow, the middle kind of Jim Crow still was ruling, where almost all the people except the preacher, the dentist, doctor, the funeral home director, and the hairdresser were all in service in white people's

homes. In that church, following Jesus, the people were freeing themselves through the power of Jesus, and the power of Jesus' name.

Some folks find it freeing, liberating, deepening to imagine Jesus transfiguring into the atoning one, the one saving them from their sins. Some of us are finding power in the blood of Jesus, some of us are learning from Jesus the teacher, and some who have had to live in the crippling situation of being ruled, judged, jailed by a civic society that does not govern on our behalf, having Jesus transfiguring into a just King, a glorious ruling monarch feels like salvation. But all the ways we think about Christ is for another sermon, another time.

I want to ask this, what does it take for a man, a woman, a beloved of God to allow him, herself, theirselves to be seen as the glorious being that God has created. Is it hubris to understand oneself as glorious, as beloved of God, as one brought back to live again, risen from some dead, limp, non-life? No, I don't think so, we who have been so near death but have learned to be gloriously alive again?

I wonder, did Jesus get all nervous about showing up with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, those great luminaries of Judaism? Was Jesus tempted to play it small as we sometimes do? Was he excited to open up his chakras, or his heart, mind and soul and let glory stream out? What would it take for you, for me to have the courage to let the glory show? What would it take?

A bunch of us went to sing with Dr. Ysaye Barnwell, formerly of Sweet Honey in the Rock, a musical ensemble that has given millions the courage to stand up, come out, be brave - the music of Sweet Honey has turned thousands of us into gerunds, folks who are working for freedom for ourselves and freedom for all. We who believe in freedom cannot rest. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes. Until the killing of a black man, black mother's son is as important as the killing of white men, white mother's sons.

I've got to tell you that it was glorious to sing with Dr. Barnwell because she taught us several things including this: if we put our music in a box and on paper only, and try to sing it right, we will be unable to experience the glory of the music, and we will not be growing, deepening, we will only be trying to get a thing right until we wrestle the life out of it so we can control it.

Dr. Barnwell asked us to do a thing we already do here at Hope Central, to sing a song of grief, an acknowledgement of how hard it is to live in covenant, in love, in community without being clumsy, unskillful, without being harmed or offering harm. We sang the song I wish I'd never been harmed. She invited us to sing, responding to her voice, pulling the words out of her mouth, if we didn't know the words, and to know worry about singing it right, but rather to respond from deep within us – and so we did, and it was a beautiful, glorious, hairy mess, us singing this song, "I wish I'd never been born," and then she changed it to Glory, glory

hallelujah yes, which built and grew and shone and finally the people to stand, glory, glory, hallelujah, since I lay my burden down. All that imperfect music, all that glory.

You know, for me, singing is a way to glory, to practice my dignity while being moved by God's glory all that the same time. What's the practice for you? Maybe for Jesus it was conversation, because our scripture said Jesus was talking to Moses and Elijah. I know it's true for Meck, my partner, God reveals herself and Meck becomes most who she is when she's talking and teaching. For you, is it keeping silence, is it being in a meeting when the folks in the room have a lot of sobriety and you can feel the serenity?

There are a couple of things I want to say in preparation for Lent and for Life.

If we are going to be glorious, we are going to making mistakes, relationship mistakes, and a thousand of other kinds of mistakes. If we are going to be avid for God, we who have been taught to button it, hold it, control it, don't let go it, are going to make mistakes.

For example, I am naturally, maybe a little bit, over exuberant. But I know that it is through my exuberance that I experience God's transfiguring presence and power. But I'm still practicing and I make mistakes.

I remember last year, about half way through Courtney's first year of being our student minister, I met her at her seminary, at Andover newton theological school. I was so excited to see her in her that I was all clumsy, got all intense, and she backed up three steps. I scared her a little bit and I saw immediately what had happened. I had slipped the boundaries of my exuberance, and well . . . because I was able to ask her forgiveness and she gave it, I was able to learn something new about stewarding my exuberance. But I didn't have stop my experience of exuberance. I learned another thing about sheperding my sweet gifts.

If we are going to be glorious, we are going to have to experiment with stepping out of the box, tripping over the edges, trying out new things, and if we cannot count on the possibility, that in our trying, that the community will be encouraging, supporting, forgiving if we fail, or that we will be forgiving, encouraging, supporting, then this church building, and the new furnace will be our box, our coffin, our death. Oh, but wait, I just noticed that building is also a gerund, building, we would be build-ing.

In Lent, we are taking up the theme, the slow work of forgiveness because if we're going to be glorious, it will help us to know, to trust, to try, to dare to let our light shine.

Beloved of God, let us have a little glory party here at Hope Central Church. The Divine is among us, and we are becoming.