

## Reflection on the Word: February 11, 2018

Many of you will remember the movie Forrest Gump for its famous line: "Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're gonna get." The movie depicts the life of a man who faces many tribulations throughout his life, but never lets any of them interfere with his happiness. From wearing braces on his legs, to having a below average IQ and even being shot in the Vietnam War, Gump continues to believe that good things will happen and goes after his dreams.

When Forrest comes back from Vietnam, his girlfriend Jenny asks, "Were you scared in Vietnam?" Forrest answers, "Yes. Well, I-I don't know. Sometimes it would stop raining long enough for the stars to come out ... and then it was nice. It was like just before the sun goes to bed down on the bayou. There was always a million sparkles on the water ... like that mountain lake. It was so clear, Jenny, it looked like there were two skies one on top of the other. And then in the desert, when the sun comes up, I couldn't tell where heaven stopped and earth began. It's so beautiful."

Have you, like Forrest Gump, had experiences of a "thin place" – a moment when God seems so close, when the extraordinary breaks into the ordinary, catching your breath; a place apart; a time when the veil between this world and the other is lifted? Moments like these are often called epiphany moments – where the light goes on in a sudden revelation of something that is mysterious or magical; or perhaps in a moment of feeling that you are truly in the presence of God. An "aha" moment.

That's what the Transfiguration is about. In today's gospel account of the mountaintop experience of Jesus, along with Peter, James, and John, a kind of miracle of divine light 'transforms' and 'transfigures' the moment and the message. In the story, the disciples are awed by the brilliance and purity of the light that illumines Jesus, that changes his whole being, and by the voice of God that speaks from the cloud, "This is my beloved Son: listen to him!"

It was wonderful that Jesus was transfigured before them; it affirmed for them his identity and helped them to see the face of God shining in this teacher who had called them to follow him.

Just as the sun reflects light through a prism, the disciples, having witnessed Jesus' transfiguration on the mountaintop, and being touched by the holy themselves, were now enabled to reflect that 'dazzling light' out to the world.

A minister in a rural church told about a lovely 90-year-old woman from his congregation named Mrs. Sampson. Mrs. Sampson was frail, feeble, even

sickly. But the minister said that whenever he was feeling discouraged, he always went to visit Mrs. Sampson. She had a radiant spirit that was contagious.

One day he asked her, "What is your secret? What keeps you happy, contented and cheerful through your sickness?" She answered with a line from a poem: "I had an hour of glory on a windswept hill." The minister, recounting this experience, reflected: "I knew she had been in touch with God and that was the whole reason for her cheerfulness."

Sometimes we refer to special events in our lives as "mountaintop experiences". Many of us have had such experiences, a time when God seemed very close. For those who have traveled in the West to the Rockies, it may have been on an actual mountain. It may have been by the seaside, watching the tides or seeing the moon, shimmering, reflected in the mirror-like waters of a lake. It may have been during a significant, life-changing moment – holding your first newborn; walking your daughter down the aisle and seeing the glow on her face; it may even have been in a moment of deep grief, holding the hand of a loved one as they peacefully slipped from this world to the next. Perhaps you have been to the mountaintop in a service of worship – through a touching hymn or prayer or an experience of loving community.

How ever they happen, mountaintop experiences in our faith journey become those moments of revelation that give us something to hold on to, for the rest of our lives. They bring us closer to the reality of the divine presence; and they enable us to reflect that presence to the people and world around us.

Of course, like Peter, our temptation is to build a box around that experience of 'glory', so that we might keep it to ourselves; capture it forever. We want to focus all our energies on maintaining the high, basking in the experience of the "holy" ... when what we are asked to do is take that experience into the unholy places of life and allow it to make a difference there.

God's command is not to commemorate a place, or an event. God's command is to connect to a person – "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased." And even further, God's command is to respond to that person: "Listen to him." The light, the moment of glory, is not meant to be boxed up; it is meant to be shared, to be reflected into the living that happens day by day.

The great Psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, was counselling a man who had been in therapy for 6 months and was getting no better. Finally, Jung said, "My friend, I can't do any more for you. What you need is God." "How do I find God, Dr. Jung?" the man asked.

"I don't know," said Jung. "But I suspect, if you find a group of people some place, that believe in God passionately, and spend some time with them, you will find God." The man did just that and he was healed ... restored to fullness of life.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves: How do we show to the world, that we believe passionately in Jesus? How have we been faithful in reflecting the light of Christ? How have lives been touched or changed through our ministry of caring, through our witness? And where, in our community and world, or even within our own church family, are there people and places still waiting to be transformed by the light of Christ's love, forgiveness and compassion, shining through us?

The mission of the church is to invite people to Christ ... to help them experience the holy, to have a relationship with God or Jesus, and with others who love and serve in Jesus' name, so that their lives might be transformed in response to that experience ... and that they, too, might become engaged in Christ's work.

As someone said, "The true measure of the church is not how many people come to worship, but how many people are touched and moved to go out and make a difference in the world." Christianity is not in the business of 'information about God', but 'transformation by God'.

The test of true worship isn't what happens one hour a week. It's how those of us who worship, live our lives all the time ... reflecting the light of Christ, through word and action. May our mountaintop experiences help us to see Jesus more clearly, so that we might follow his holy will in lives of faithful ministry and service to others. Amen.