

EpiphanyLast\_YrB\_021515\_mcr  
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of God, who listens and loves and transforms. Amen.

Today is the Last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. No matter which year of the lectionary we are in - A, B or C - the Gospel story on the last Sunday of Epiphany is always about the same thing: the trip to the mountaintop with Jesus, Peter, James and John, where Jesus meets Moses and Elijah - both long dead - and is transfigured in front of his companions. Because we are currently in Year B, we read the story of Mark's account of this bizarre and sort of 'magical' event. Next year we'll read from Luke and the year after that, from Matthew.

No matter which Gospel we are reading, the details of the story are remarkably the same. Jesus and the guys go up the mountain. Moses and Elijah appear and Jesus has a conversation with them. Jesus' body changes in appearance - it becomes dazzling (or glowing) white. Then the disciples who are there hear a voice from the clouds saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him."

Well, what is the heck are we supposed to make of that? This for sure would not be one of the stories about Jesus that I would pick to use to attract people to the Episcopal Church. I mean, we talk about the Episcopal Church being grounded in scripture, tradition and reason as a huge part of its appeal, and then we read this?! Seriously?! I might as well bring my Pink Jesus out here and say this is the transfigured Jesus! A brilliantly glowing holy figure does not make any more sense than this Magic 8-Ball Jesus, unless we are in a Stephen Spielberg movie. Making sense of this story is not easy.

So, after many years of preaching on this particular Sunday, I've finally decided that the transfigured Jesus isn't supposed to be figured out. Instead, I think we are supposed to stand in his glow, so to speak, and appreciate him with wonder and awe. And I think that when we consider this story of the transfiguration, we should think about love - love for God, love from God, love for each other and love for ourselves.

Last week, Jim reminded us that, "we are meant to live lives that are awestruck...awestruck with the knowledge of what God can do through us." And he said, "That requires of course everything of us...it requires paying attention to our

world and acting for the greater good," that "we are to raise people up to know their worth," and that "there are so many people for us to love."

In preparing for this sermon, I was struck (or maybe I was transfigured) once again by a passage I read by Anne Lamott that she wrote yesterday for Valentine's Day. It had never occurred to me until then to make any connection between Valentine's Day and the Transfiguration, but it really feels right to me. First, she told a story she heard 25 years ago from a Buddhist teacher and said it was the best story about love that she had ever heard:

*A three-year-old girl was diagnosed with leukemia. She needed a massive blood transfusion. Everyone in her family was tested to see who would be the best blood donor. It was her ten-year-old brother. Their parents asked him if he was willing to do this. He said he needed some time to think. A full day later, he said he would do it.*

*Some time later, he was hospitalized, prepped, and lay on a gurney, hooked up to the blood donor equipment. His blood filled a liter bag. He was very pale. The nurse bent over him, and asked if he was okay. He said, "Yes." Then he asked, "How soon until I start to die?"*

Ms. Lamott goes on to say:

*You have your own stories of love that defy logic, times when you were saved - or helped another be saved - against all odds, with this invisible force. Love is so real that a girl could faint remembering all that has healed in her. It is all that we take with us when we cross over to the other side of eternity - the love we gave, and received. It is the only warmth in this cold weird world, and it (love) is also cooling breezes, superglue, duct tape, patience, tears and, of course, M&Ms.....*

*That's what I teach my Sunday School kids, that they are loved and chosen. Period.....So keep reminding yourself: loved, chosen. Love is what we are made of, and what we are made for. Who you love, and whose love you receive, is who you are. It is the meaning of our lives. It is as omnipresent and provable as oxygen. In fact, it IS oxygen. It's like the nourishing air I found at my tiny church at the end of my drinking career. It was the most real thing I'd ever found, sitting there, sick as a dog on a wobbly folding chair, surrounded by*

*strangers. I didn't know it was holy spirit but I did know that it was food. And I discovered that I could breathe again.*

*Love, the Force, call it what you will, is in our hands. In the Christian tradition, we say that Jesus has no hands but ours, to show His love.*

*Our hands that maybe have grown to look a tiny bit more like our mother's that had been hoped. They are beyond amazing.*

*Our hands, that try to grab onto everything we see, that we like.*

*Our hands, so often clenched in fists, of clinging onto stuff we cannot bear to let go of, no matter how much pain that causes us.*

*My brother and sister albies and addicts say that EVERYthing we've ever let go of has claw marks on it. And still, these clinging grasping aging hands are the only hands that Love has, to do its work.....*

*They are our grandparents; hands, the hands of our nephews and nieces - future kids. Wow. These hands that are somehow part of the eternal.....*

*It's like a miracle or something, this business of love. I have GLWD inscribed on the secret inside of my ring - God's Love We Deliver being the great people in NYC who bring food and love to people with AIDS. You know how they say cigarettes are simply "nicotine delivery systems?" Hands are love delivery systems. That's what [Valentine's Day] (or maybe we should insert 'the Transfiguration') is about, because that is what every day is about. So let's get to work.*

I imagine God looking down at Jesus on the mountaintop: "That's my boy! I love him! We are loved. We are chosen.

The brother asked, "How soon until I start to die?"

How awesome is that!

It is our honor and our privilege and our call to reach out our hands and raise people to dignity and wholeness. Let's get to work, indeed!

