

Transfiguration Sunday

February 27, 2022

Luke 9:28-36

Pastor Ann Hultquist

The Hubble Space Telescope. I hope when you hear that name, you can picture in your mind some of the amazing images it has captured in space for 30 years, so far beyond anywhere humans can possibly travel. The light, the stars, and the colors of nebulas, supernovas, and other galaxies--purple and blue, yellow and pink--are so amazing that they take your breath away.

Hubble's successor, the James Webb Telescope is the world's largest, most powerful, most complex space telescope ever built. You probably heard that it launched on Christmas Day last year and it's now a million miles--a million miles from earth. It is 100 times more powerful than Hubble--can you imagine what the pictures it sends back will be like?

It is so easy to forget that you and I and our entire planet are just a small speck in the beauty and vastness of our universe and in all the universes beyond that we can't even conceptualize. There is so much mystery involved, even when we send a 10 billion dollar very precise, very scientific instrument into space. One author has expressed it this way:

Straight up from this road, straight up through the sky above this road right now, galaxies are colliding with each other.

I try to remember that.

And even in the gold and purple pretense of evening, I make myself remember

That it would take 40,000 years--40,000 years and the fastest thing we own,

To reach the one star nearest to us.

(from 'Achieving Perspective' by Pattiann Rogers)

Mystery. Mystery that astounds...that's the experience of Peter, John, and James on the mountain. A few moments that defy explanation and that refuse to be wrestled into the box of what they already know. Invited by Jesus to come along and pray, they might have expected some teaching about prayer, or maybe some

more explanation of all that Jesus was doing. In their short time so far, Jesus has taught, healed, raised a young girl from death, fed 5,000+, and then stymied the disciples by talking about his own death and about an invitation to carry a cross. Maybe on the mountain they would get some clarity. That's not what happened.

Dazzling brightness, light, glory, two prophets, an enveloping cloud and the voice of God.. Preachers on Transfiguration Sunday are tempted to take 11 minutes to explain just what happened, so we can categorize it into something *we* already know.. And we're all tempted to say things like "I wonder what they were thinking?" when it seems like the three followers weren't really thinking anything at all, just experiencing God's presence. God's presence in Jesus and so with them. That's what mystery does to you--it pulls you out of what you know and into a feeling and a moment that is difficult to explain to anyone else and maybe even to yourself. Bathed in the light and wonder, Peter finally stammers out a few words but before he is finished, God's voice interrupts and then the moment is over.

Mystery. Maybe you are thinking of a moment in your own life which took your breath away. Or you may not be.

Many of us living in this 21st century have a hard time with mystery. Science, Technology, Engineering, Math--that's what's needed today and into the future, we're told. The concrete, the quantifiable, the bankable is what really matters and is what gets most of the attention around us. And yet, in a contradiction, we also love experiences of transcendence: we find it in all types of music and in sports, travel and spectacles of all kinds--from half-time shows and fireworks and flyovers. We seek those moments that tell us that data is *not* all there is.

How else do you explain all of us sitting here this morning? Even if you're here because you feel obligated, even if you are here because someone made you come, there is a longing in each of us for this hour of transcendence, a longing for the unexplainable: *light from light, true God from true God* we say; music that lifts us somehow outside our self; Jesus fully present in bread and wine; a splash of baptismal water, a cross traced and 'welcome child of God'; a benediction which says God calls *us* by name...it's all mystery, but a mystery we are invited into. Here. Now.

Luke's Gospel begins with the bright light of angels in Jerusalem and Nazareth and Bethlehem, who announce the amazing good news that our small speck of a planet, this tiny place in the vastness of infinity, is where Immanuel, 'God With Us' chooses to live. In today's passage, bright light and glory shine around Jesus, Elijah, and Moses; and they talk about Jesus' *departure*--the Greek word is actually *exodus*. God's people, once led through the Red Sea with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, will be saved by the wounded hands of Jesus, outstretched in love on the cross. Hands that reach and reach and reach to draw all people to God's heart.

Maybe on a morning like this, with the world enveloped in war, it's hard to see the effect of Christ's love. But that love which embraces us also sends us out from here with the light: "May God's face shine on you and give you peace," we say. May these moments of mystery and unexplainable grace kindle in us the light of love and hope that we can share with our weary and beautiful world.