

Transfiguration Sunday C
Peace, Seattle
March 3, 2019

WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD

Today on the final weekend before the journey of Lenten begins, we celebrate the Light of Christ, marking our celebration with stories of mountaintops and glowing faces.

- Our readings begin with Exodus, and the glory of God shining on the face of Moses.
- Then, Paul incites us to act boldly, turning our eyes to the Lord so that no veil will come between us and the light he brings.
- And finally we become witnesses with Peter, James and John of the bright-as-lightning-glory that shines in the face of Jesus; surrounding him as he stands with Moses and Elijah up on the mount of Transfiguration.

Each one of these texts in its own way is an invitation to WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD. Well, what does it mean to walk in the light of the Lord?

Today I'd like to suggest three ways for understanding what happens when the light of Christ becomes active in our lives, and what it might mean for us to walk in that light.

(1) The first thing we learn about the light we see in Jesus is that this light is not benign or passive, but has the power to expose what it illuminates.

Time after time in his encounters with people—whether they be fisherman or lepers, Pharisees or prostitutes—Jesus enters into the exchange in such a way that surface layers are peeled back, laying bare the truth of the matter which lies under the surface.

Like a CT scanner, Jesus sees right through the fake fronts and traps, the masks and smoke screens, and diagnoses the true state of heart and mind. His searching reveals truths about us we would most often prefer not to see.

If you've ever done a remodeling job on your home, you know that the process of pulling off the surface layers gives you a view of the structure of your home that's rarely seen.

The fact is, when you begin remodeling you can never be sure what you're getting into. You might have an idea about what you want to do and how you want to do it, but until you actually start tearing off sheet rock, baring studs, and pulling up carpet, you don't really know what you're in for.

When Jesus shines his light into our lives, he looks beneath the surface, under the wallpaper, the paint, the decorating. Jesus' light penetrates all those superficial layers. It doesn't matter to him what we look like on the outside—he wants to know what kind of core our lives are being built upon.

Now, raise your hand if you're comfortable with that kind of exposure... Me neither!

Having personality flaws, resentments and secrets exposed like warped beams or dry rot? No thanks! It's frightening to think of what Christ knows about me.

So that first encounter with the penetrating light of Jesus feels more like judgment than grace.

I remember as a young boy being captivated by the power of a magnifying lens.

Not only could I make small things appear larger, I could capture and focus the sun's rays to do some pretty cool stuff—like burning my initials onto a piece of wood.

In some ways, the light of Christ is like that lens: it magnifies our lives, so that the impurities and inconsistencies and all that stuff we'd rather keep hidden, is exposed before God and ourselves.

The writer of Psalm 139 asks:

WHERE CAN I FLEE FROM YOUR PRESENCE, LORD?
IF I SAY, "SURELY THE DARKNESS SHALL COVER ME, AND THE LIGHT AROUND ME
BECOME NIGHT," EVEN THE DARKNESS IS NOT DARK TO YOU;
THE NIGHT IS AS BRIGHT AS THE DAY, FOR DARKNESS IS AS LIGHT TO YOU.

Walking in the light of the Lord means there's no place I can go to hide from God. That's a promise that fills me both with fear and relief—FEAR because what I'd rather keep hidden is exposed. But also RELIEF, because God knows my whole story...and loves me anyway.

Walking in the light of the Lord begins with truth telling. Our encounter with his Light convicts and purifies us even while it claims us. Accepting the truth about ourselves opens our eyes to the deeper truth of God's boundless love and mercy.

(2) The second thing we learn about Christ's light is that keeping our eyes on him illuminates the way ahead, pointing us toward the path of life.

I had a little Honda station wagon for many years that I loved dearly (they don't make them anymore.) It got great gas mileage and ran well even after 130,000 miles. But it did have a problem. Because it was built so low to the ground, the headlights were always getting knocked out by rocks and debris kicked up by the logging and chip trucks that shared the highway when I worked in the mountains of Northwest California.

I remember one time when the left headlight was out, but I hadn't gotten around to replacing it.

Well, somewhere along the way, as I headed home from a meeting along a remote stretch of the Trinity River, my right headlight also took a hit. The problem was I didn't notice it until dusk came. When I turned my lights on, nothing happened.

Fortunately a full moon was on the rise that night, so after driving as far as I could in the gathering dark, I pulled over and waited for the moon to get high enough so that I could drive by its light.

Sometimes we don't think about where we're going or the path ahead until we find ourselves stuck. Until the shadows are lengthening, and the night is closing in.

But when we turn our eyes to the face of Jesus, we find a source for direction and guidance that will never fail us, even in the darkest of times.

Winter in the upper Midwest is a long affair. Snow can fly anytime from October through April, making winter the longest season of the year.

(If ever there was ever a year we all could identify with the experience—this is it!)

In certain parts of the country the snowmobile is the vehicle of choice. That's how it is on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. During the long nights of winter, emergency crews get called out on more snowmobile accidents than car accidents. It was one of those snowmobile accidents that sent a crew out from the station late one night.

The dispatcher had gotten a call reporting a collision between two snowmachines just north of town, about a mile out on Lake Superior. The emergency response team quickly donned their gear and a few minutes later were moving out onto the ice on their machines.

Bill and Dave arrived first, their headlights lighting up the accident scene. Between the broken remains of two snowmobiles, two bodies laid still in the snow. Beyond them a third person was calling out, his voice wracked with fear and pain.

Bill and Dave trained their flashlights in the direction of the voice, and started to approach him, but they stopped when their lights caught the glint of the .22 caliber pistol in his trembling hand.

He was injured, disoriented, and scared.

As Bill and Dave backed away, the other team members, Don and Jack, pulled up. They talked together about what to do.

As they talked, Jack glanced at the broken engine hoods from the crash and saw something familiar. The voice of the injured man cried out again. Jack knew that voice.

SHINE YOUR LIGHT ON MY FACE, Jack told the others, AND GIVE ME ROOM.
THAT MAN IS MY NEIGHBOR. WHEN HE SEES MY FACE HE'LL RECOGNIZE ME.

They approached the injured man for a second time, their lights shining on Jack's face. BOBBY, he called, IT'S ME, JACK. YOU CAN PUT DOWN YOUR GUN—WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

Walking in the Light of the Lord means recognizing in the face of Jesus our source of mercy and healing. It means taking everything to him in prayer, and making a practice of looking for his steady beam among the many pretenders that call out for us to follow.

(3) Finally, walking in the light of the Lord means walking with a new level of confidence and trust that Jesus will stick with us no matter what the terrain, no matter what the circumstances.

When I was a camp counselor, on the first night of our evening campfire, all the kids would bring their flashlights. I've never met a seven year old who isn't totally enthralled with a flashlight, and the power of that little hand held beam to illuminate the night. Without fail, at the first campfire, light beams would be shining every which way—out in the woods, up in the sky, at each other—like a swarm of dancing fireflies.

But it wasn't until we were on our way back to the cabins for the night that the true purpose of the light became clear. With the sun down, the trails through the woods turned pitch-black, and you could hardly see your own feet, let alone the path to the cabin.

Negotiating the uneven terrain in that forest in the dark would lead to stumbles and falls—a frightening experience. But with the flashlights trained on the trail, we could walk with confidence and without fear.

When Peter, James and John hike up the Mountain with Jesus, they don't know what they're in for. The transformation they witness in him leaves them dazzled and disoriented.

Peter thinks that perhaps they've arrived at the summit of their journey with Jesus. He offers to put up some tents so they can hang out for a good long while.

But after the cloud envelopes them, and the VOICE speaks; after the light returns to normal and Jesus directs them all back down the mountain, they find the world below just as they'd left it: full of innocent victims; full of need. No, this wasn't the summit after all; it wasn't the end.

Another leg of the journey is yet before them. The final leg, which will lead them toward Jerusalem and another mountain called Golgotha.

Walking with the light of Christ means taking steps on a journey of which we cannot see the ending; trusting that he will illuminate our journey step by step and give us an inner light to guide.

That inner light is the Holy Spirit, given to us at our baptism, which will stay with us through thick and thin, up and down, light and dark and shadow, as we make our way along the path, as we follow Christ to the cross and empty tomb.

Walking in the Light of the Lord...

It's sobering and illuminating and trust-inducing all at the same time. A journey we make our whole life through.

And we are still on our way...so let us go on together, walking in the light of the Lord.

PRAYER (ELW pg 304)

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.