

Transfiguration Sunday 2024
[2 Kings 2:1-12](#); [Psalm 50:1-6](#); [2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#); Mark 9:2-6
St. Clares' Episcopal Church
The Rev. Liz Schellingerhoudt

*The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leaped up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope*

These are lines from a poem that the British poet and Anglican priest Malcolm Guite wrote entitled "A Sonnet on the Transfiguration." The poem is written from the perspective of Peter, James and John, about their experience with Jesus as he turned a dazzling white. The Love that dances at the heart of things Shone out upon us from a human face And to that light the light in us leaped up, We felt it quicken somewhere deep within, A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday after The Epiphany and the Sunday before Lent. The whole transfiguration experience is something that no one really understands. There are, of course, lots of explanations. The most common is that the divine power that Jesus has been giving away and sharing with others now transforms Jesus completely. What has been hidden in him – his true nature - is now revealed. Peter, James and John are there to witness it.

This week is Ash Wednesday and next Sunday is the first Sunday in Lent. Our opening collect today uses the phrase "Grant to us that we may be changed into his likeness from glory to glory." Changed into the likeness of Christ. How does that happen exactly?

The disciples who were with him on the mountain top want to stay there, but Jesus leads them down the mountain. It isn't a place to stay, on the mountain. Most of us, most of the time, live in the day to day and may have a couple of mountain-top experiences in our lives, yet our everyday experiences are the way in which we grow in our likeness to Christ. Living through the day to day on our own, though, isn't enough to be changed into Christ's likeness.

One of the ways we can cooperate with Christ, to be more like Christ, is to put ourselves in the pathways of grace.

Do you remember the movie Finding Nemo? For those of you who haven't seen it, it's a cartoon movie about a little fish being raised by his father. His mother is deceased, and his father is overprotective about everything, but particularly about swimming out of the coral reef which is his own, small neighborhood. Nemo is growing up, though, and decides to go out beyond the reef to see what the big deal is. He is captured by a diver and taken far away to live in a fish tank. The rest of the movie is about his father searching the vast ocean for his son, Nemo, and the marine animals he meets along the way who decide to help him.

The band of rescuers determines that little Nemo has been taken to Sidney, far away from where they are. It's discouraging and overwhelming to think of swimming so

far, and Nemo's father is hearbroken. But a giant turtle suggests that there's another way – joining the East Australian Current, a giant, fast current which, if they can hop in, will take them there much faster than they could by swimming without it. And they succeed.

We can put ourselves in the pathways of grace, like the East Australian Current that helped the little entourage find Nemo and our Anglican tradition has gathered ways to do just that. Our way of joining the current of God's grace is based on Benedictine spirituality – St. Benedict who formed a monastic order.

The Sunday morning Eucharist puts us in the pathway of grace. We come together as a community of people, part of the body of Christ, and we read Scripture, we reflect on what we've heard, we share in the body and blood of Christ, and we sing our adoration and praise to God. What we do on Sunday morning forms us as members of the body of Christ and creates a community which offers a way for us to grow in our likeness of Christ.

Our Benedictine tradition does not stop with the Sunday morning Eucharist. There is a three-pronged understanding of prayer, with the Sunday Eucharist as just one. The other two are personal devotions and the prayers of the church. The prayers of the church are what we do during Morning Prayer and Compline, and we are adding Evening Prayer during Lent. These three times of the day that we will pray together as a parish are joined with the daily prayers of the Church around the world. Hymn 24 says, "We thank thee that thy Church unsleeping, while earth rolls onward into light, through all the world her watch is keeping, and rests not now by day or night." The daily prayers we offer as a congregation here at St. Clare's through these short services on Facebook are added to the prayers of the Church that happen in every time zone every minute of the day so that there is steady swell of prayer at all times. This is corporate prayer – the Church universal joining with people around the world to lift our voices in supplication and thanksgiving. It's like a steady hum of prayer, a beautiful vibration in the earth that we participate in and add to, and when joined with others it's happening 24/7, 365 days of the year. These prayers of the Church take us out of ourselves and connect us to the larger reality of God's love for the world.

Personal prayers and devotions take on many different forms. There isn't one right way to pray but our personal prayer usually fits our personality. We go to God to ask for God to intercede in our lives, the lives of family and friends, the life of the world and even strangers. We go to God to listen, listen deeply so that we can grow in our understanding and relationship with God and to hear God's word for our lives. We also read and reflect on Scripture and other spiritual readings – contemporary or even ancient writings by people who have some wisdom or insight to share with us, to challenge us and to help us understand the life of faith better.

These three, Sunday Eucharist, the Daily Office, and personal devotions, are our tradition's main way of putting ourselves in the pathway of grace, and there is a lot of variety in each.

Malcolm Guite's poem that I quoted earlier was written with the belief that the glimpse of Christ's glory that the disciples saw on that mountain was a gift to them to sustain them through Good Friday. The Transfiguration for me is an assurance of God's presence, even in the darkness, and an affirmation that we are never abandoned. An assurance that we are always surrounded by the "saints in light" who have gone before us,

like Jesus was surrounded by Moses and Elijah. We do have a trustworthy God, a God who is the life behind all life, and that regardless of what is happening in our lives or the life of the world, these two truths – that God has our best interest at heart and is therefore trustworthy, and that God’s life is enough to sustain all life – is the gift given to the disciples and to us, to carry us through darkness and into the light. This is the reason that we want to be swept up into the pathways of grace – to know and experience the deep peace of God in the midst of our everyday lives, both in the mundane and in the times of darkness, to let that long-extinguished hope blaze again.

Here's Malcolm Guite's poem in complete. You have a copy of it.

For that one moment, 'in and out of time',
On that one mountain where all moments meet,
The daily veil that covers the sublime
In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.
There were no angels full of eyes and wings
Just living glory full of truth and grace.
The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leaped up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope
Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.
Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.

May you enter into Lent this year determined to join the pathway of grace so that the Love that dances at the heart of things is with you every day and in every part of your life. A blessed Lent to you.