

**February 7, 2016 Transfiguration of Jesus**

**Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Corinthians 3:12—4:2**

**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Luke 9:28-36 (37-43)**

New York Times, 6-11-10, Lorraine Ali, Behind the Veil.

Jim Wallis, America's Original Sin.

**Grace and peace, beloved of Christ. Amen.**

**Let us pray...**

**I begin with two stories.**

**First, on Monday evening we hosted here the Luther College Nordic Choir, the end of their tour.**

It was a fantastic concert—many of you were here—with a wide selection of music and the place was filled! Luther College reported selling 556 tickets, and then there were the 70-some singers, and a few others. Nearly every seat was taken and rows of folding chairs were added to stretch our capacity.

Toward the end of the concert, their director, Dr. Allen Hightower, turned to address the audience.

It was warm and they'd been working hard, their faces were shiny with the heat and intensity of the moment. He thanked us, our congregation, for hosting them and for the good hospitality, and then he said something

like this: I often tell the singers 'You know, some nights we do a concert and they "don't get us", but then there are other nights, and other performances, when it works, when they do "get us."

That was the case on Monday evening: We connected, and there was this palpable spirit, this energy between those who perform and those who listen, something happened in this space, it was alive, holy.

**The other story is actually based on a newspaper article, one of many on this subject:**

A few years back Lorraine Ali wrote a piece in the New York Times called, "Behind the Veil".

She focused on a woman named Hebah (HIB-ah) Ahmed, a Tennessee native, a mechanical engineer, an American Muslim woman who began wearing a Niqab, veil covering part of her face, after 9/11.

In the Times article, Hebah (HIB-ah) said, "*I do this because I want to be closer to God.*"

**This is Transfiguration Sunday**, the final Sunday in the season of Epiphany; we're on the cusp of Lent.

Epiphany is all about miracles big and small, revelations—God-sighting really, incarnation and holy mystery. The concert on Monday evening, Hebah (HIB-ah) in her veil and yearning to be closer to God, we could add to this list the Women's Retreat last weekend, and surely more.

What will we do with these Epiphanies, these mountain-top experiences?

Are we frightened like the Israelites and Aaron, afraid to come near Moses for his face is shining with glory? Or like Peter, James and John, in our apathy or sleepiness, do we try to capture the moment, build the little shelter so we can linger? Take the perfect picture? Find just the right souvenir?

Do we tell others what we've seen? What we've experienced? That thing that brought us to tears?

Do we follow Paul's lead to the Corinthians? "Act with great boldness," he says.

There's a push and pull in the gospel: just incase they missed the big glory, God underlines it, echoing

Jesus' baptism, again speaking from a cloud, affirming, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him."

What will we do with these epiphanies? What will we do once the cloud has passed and we're tromping down the mountain, dazed, silent? What will we do?

**I've often preached on this these texts and thought a lot about the mountain tops and valleys.**

This week, though, what I've been mulling is simply: **Reflecting Glory.**

We glimpse this glory, this beautiful, dazzling savior, and my question is:

**How are we reflecting this glory?** That's our role, our primary role, as Christ's faithful: Reflecting glory.

Now, I'm not talking about glory where everything is mountain-top wonderful,

but rather Jesus' glory that shines so intensely that it can carry us through life's suffering, life's Lents, to the cross, all the way to Easter new life.

**How are we reflecting this humble, honest, lived glory of our savior?**

**That's why I wanted to read that second part of today's gospel.**

They've come down from the mountain and right away a father is begging the disciples and Jesus for help.

Maybe right there with that desperate father and his son so overcome by some kind of unclean spirit, maybe right there is Jesus' true glory—he can turn on a dime.

We have a Savior rooted in tradition, powerful, transcendent, and at once intimate, pragmatic, imminent.

**Some of you may have caught Jim Wallis this week.**

He spoke at the Westminster Town Hall Forum on Thursday and Public Radio carried it.

I couldn't be at Westminster, but was part of a conversation with him that morning with a number of others.

He was talking about his new book, America's Original Sin, with the tag line: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America. Find a copy, let's read it together!

Jim Wallis insisted that it's time to get theological about race and privilege.

This sin—beginning way back with slave time—our corporate sin, is systematically believing that people with black and brown skin aren't created as fully in God's image, in the Imago Dei, as white folks are.

It's a sin against these beloved, but also a sin against God, and really, it's an idol, it separates us from God and each other, from our selves, and our souls.

And it's not done yet, it's not "solved" all nice and tidy, for repentance is needed—turning around, going a different direction, and reparations, and risk taking in the face of power.

**Today we celebrate being a Reconciling in Christ congregation**—a congregation welcoming of the participation and leadership of all people—all sexual orientations, all gender identities—those of us who are gay or lesbian, bi or trans or queer or straight.

This sense of being created in the image of God, the Imago Dei, is key to this welcome, that's what makes it work, makes it honest, genuine, authentic.

And like with issues of race and privilege, believing that people—regardless of our skin tone, regardless of our gender identity, regardless of who we love—believing that we are created in God's good image makes it so much easier to spot God's glory reflected.

**Some times people shine**—really, I've seen it, perhaps you have too, it's a spark, it's there.

Most often the reflection of glory is a little more subtle but we hear it in their words, and in their faith, and in how they live on the easy days and the hard day and long nights—never forgetting that Christ holds them, holds us, and loves us and our broken and beautiful world—that's the glory I see reflected.

**This week I invite you back to church as we begin Lent on Ash Wednesday.**

This Lenten season leads us to Holy Week and the cross, but also to Easter morning.

The spiritual *Just a Poor Wayfaring Stranger* will root our worship and that image of Wayfaring, going by foot, the path, the journey, will come back time and again.

There'll be additional opportunities for prayer, for naming prayer concerns as a community.

Sunday morning, and then Wednesday evening worship and Bible Study, will frame our time; some weeks there'll also be Wednesday midday services.

Together we'll carry Jesus' glory along the path to the cross—we'll pray hard, but we'll also act out our faith, grappling with injustice and just how we best love one another and God's creation.

**What will you be doing tomorrow morning at, let's say, 10am?**

Picture yourself doing whatever it is you do on Mondays at 10am.

Now picture yourself doing it, trusting that you are created in God's image, and that you are reflecting Jesus' glory, shining just a little for God is with you, making you bold, drawing you close, showing you the way.

**This week, dear friends:** watch for Jesus' glory, but even more, watch and listen for Jesus' glory reflected in the people around you, and in you. **May this glorious mystery fill you and keep you to the cross.**