

Transfiguration Sunday YC 2022

The Light is Real All the Time
By the Rev. Salying Wong

A few years ago, I went to visit Donna Stadfeld in rehab. As some of you might recall, Donna had a series of falls that resulted in hospitalization because of brain bleeding. She was in a coma for a while and it was tenuous. One day, I went into the hospital room and heard Hawaiian music playing. Her son said he was hoping to reach Donna with the music. It was then that I learned that Donna was an excellent hula dancer in her younger days.

Amazingly, the swelling in Donna's brain decreased and she woke and was placed in rehab. I went to visit her at the rehab center. Rehab places can be difficult places to go. On this day that I visited Donna, I was particularly troubled. I was troubled by the smell of human waste, the greenish pallor cast on people's skin by the fluorescent light. I was troubled by the vacant expressions or drooling of the elderly sitting in wheelchairs along the hall as I walked to Donna's room. I found myself getting depressed, struggling with a summation gathering in my mind: So, this is it?—you can live a life full of vitality and have it taken from you and here you are. What was the point?

Before going into Donna's room, I leaned against the wall to quiet myself, and I prayed. When I opened my eyes, all the walls had disappeared and everything was shimmering light. And then everything came back as quickly as if the moment never happened.

I experienced for a moment the veil of temporal reality pulled back and saw everything as it really is—that everything is in God, that nothing is absent of God. Up till that moment, I thought I knew how to see—and how to interpret what I see. I saw disease and said, "That is bad and that is sad and that should be fixed. I saw aging and losing one's faculties and think what a shame. I thought I knew what I was looking at. I thought what I was looking at was all that was real.

But, what if the light—the divine light—is actually the reality, the basic reality that holds all that we experience, from joy to suffering and everything in between? What if what happens on the mount of transfiguration is the durable reality which holds all other realities? What if the light is there all the time, but we don't see it?

The story of the Transfiguration is always placed here in the liturgical year, at the threshold of Lent. Lent means spring—that is, the time when light begins to flood our days. So, it is an apt time to witness the brilliant divine light when the veil is pulled back on that mountain—that mountain where Jesus takes Peter, James and John before he sets his face to Jerusalem, where he will be crucified. Preceding this scene, Jesus tells them that he will be crucified. It is heavy and perplexing news. And Jesus needs to pray. So he takes some of his closest disciples with him to pray. This Transfiguration story also happens in Matthew and Mark, but Jesus only prays in Luke. Praying is very important in the Gospel of Luke. It is in prayer that the Holy Spirit shows up, and so she does today.

When the Spirit comes, she comes in the same way that she came to Mary—she overshadows them. The overshadowing takes the form of a cloud that shrouds Peter, James and John. In the cloud, in their terror, they hear God saying to them, “Listen. Listen to my beloved son.” What will they give birth to after this experience? They needed a lot of silence to ponder this, and so they kept silent.

Also in Luke something unique happens. We get to hear what Moses, Elijah, and Jesus are talking about. They are talking about Jesus' “departure”, which is more aptly translated as “exodus.” I imagine that they commiserate about Moses' exodus—how costly it was. Pharaoh would not let the Hebrews go without the plagues, without the death of the firstborn Egyptian sons—and even when they finally ran from Pharaoh, his thirst for control and power could not afford to let them go. He sent his armies after them. Pharaoh could not imagine his power tarnished. He must take everyone with him, even his armies, even weak slaves who just wanted to be free. It was full of suffering. It would be the same way with Caesar and his empire making and all other caesars and their imperialism. Liberation has costly consequences. So, they talked about Jesus' exodus within the transfiguration light so that they might have hope. Within the light, nothing is absent of God, not even the journey Jesus will have to undergo to Jerusalem. Without this light, Jesus' journey to the cross was madness that

led to absurdity and meaninglessness. Within the light, there is hope; there is resurrection and new life.

We can look at our own suffering; we can look at the suffering in the world around us. Without the divine light, the pharaohs and caesars think they are the center of the universe and can bully everyone and everything into submission. And they cause immense suffering and death. Without the divine light, the lives of those who suffer and die feel absurd and meaningless. This is why we need to recall the transfiguration and the divine light that holds all reality and that nothing is absent of God. It holds all the suffering beings on this planet. Nothing is too far from God. God cannot be absent.

As we begin Lent, pray with Jesus on that holy mountain. Hear God saying, "Listen to Jesus." Trust the divine light that enlightens everything. Nothing is too far from God. God cannot be absent.