

Sermon for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany 2010

For the last five years I have preached a sermon on Religion and science on this Sunday nearest Charles Darwin's birthday. Some 1000 churches across our land will hear sermons on what has become known as Evolution Weekend. If we learn to read the Bible as our ancestors did illuminating those "thin places" where we may have a glimpse of the Holy, then we will find no conflict with evolution and appreciate the creation stories of the Bible, for instance, as metaphor. Our text for today offers a visit to one of those "thin places" by Peter, James, and John.

Brian Stoffregen writes about our experience of reading the Gospel: *"Can we hear this word about Jesus' betrayal and suffering? I would guess that our picture of the... holy Son of God would be much more like what the disciples saw on the mountaintop -- Jesus in all of his glory, shining bright in dazzling white. Seeing that, we would know that he is God's Son However, seeing Jesus dying on the cross, we might not be so sure about him. Hearing that voice from heaven, we would know Jesus is God's son. However, when we hear nothing -- the silence on Good Friday -- the silence at "down times" in our lives, we might wonder about Jesus. Seeing that dazzling white engulfing Jesus on the mountain, we would be sure. However, seeing the dark red of blood streaming down his face, we wouldn't be so sure. When Moses and Elijah are at Jesus' side, he is really somebody special. However, when it's two convicted criminals, we might wonder about this Jesus. When Jesus heals the sick and raises the dead, we know his power. When our friends get sick and die, we question if Jesus has the power to do anything for us. On the mountain, Peter talks about building dwellings or shrines to this glorious moment -- and he doesn't know what he is saying. However, at the trial, Peter denies he knows Jesus -- does he know what he is saying then? On the mountain it was easy to believe. At the cross, it was ... near impossible. It shouldn't have been so difficult at the cross. Jesus had told them about it numerous times before the event, but they hadn't listened to him."* Are we listening? As Rae Hadley prepared for this day of induction into the Daughters of the King, so are we invited to join her in growing our prayer life this Lent. Come and join us Ash Wednesday, Sundays and Tuesdays in Lent in prayer.

The early teacher Eriugena tells us that "the heart of all life is the light of God," and "It is to this light that we are called to be reconnected, both within ourselves and in all things." Perhaps what

happened up on that mountain is that the disciples were given an opportunity to see and feel what is present always, the light of God in all of creation, including in us, but that day it just burst forth in Jesus, and their eyes were practically blinded and they didn't know what to do. It's not that something spiritual happened up above and then something material, something physical, down below. After all, the people were astounded by the greatness, the glory, of a God who healed a father's only little boy. If we recover the ability to hold the spiritual and material in a unity that is much healthier than the split between the two that has dominated our way of being for centuries, it will transform "the way in which the matter of creation is responded to," J. Philip Newell writes, "whether that is the matter of earth's body or the bodies of women, men, and human communities." We're reading about God's glory and light in the Gospel of Luke, but Celtic spirituality looks to John's Gospel, where light is present at the very beginning, and "we have seen his glory...full of grace and truth". In *The Book of Creation: An Introduction to Celtic Spirituality*, Newell draws on that account to help us see God's glory in everything: "*From that inaccessible light of God all life comes forth, whether that be the morning light of the burning sun, the yellow brilliance of the sunflower growing from the dark ground or the glow of starfish emerging in the depths of the sea. It is the light within all life.*" To see it, we have to use our "inner eye. In all people, in all places, in every created thing the light of God is shining." And yet, at the same time, "God is always more than that light," and "God can never be known. [God] is always more than the wind and the waters,...., greater than thought and image". In fact, as Kim L. Beckmann reminds us, *all* of this is beyond our understanding: "There's no one thing in our experience that encompasses all we need to know about God. That's why metaphor is the language of insight and revelation. It's what it is, what it isn't, and the new things we discover in the collision of worlds that moves us closer" (*New Proclamation 2010*).

Do read and hear this text as a call to take what we have experienced out into the world? How do we integrate our glimpses of God's love into the everydayness of our lives? Are we awake to what God is doing in the world, and in our lives, and in the life of this congregation? Is transformation really a sudden thing, or a day-by-day, perhaps even hour-by-hour process? How are we listening to the God's command to "listen to Jesus"?

*Lord of the Mountaintop, God of dazzling clothes,
Be with us when we come down from the height of worship*

*To face a world
That didn't see what we just saw in you.
Show us what to do.*

*When demons rage though elementary schools
Let it not be said that your disciples could not cast the devil out.
When violence threatens to engulf our communities
Let it not be said that your disciples cowered in fear
Or walked on the other side of the road.
When there is peril or fire or flood,
Let it not be said that your disciples cleared the unwanted junk from their garages
And called it charity ❖.*

*Lord of the Mountaintop experience, God of dazzling clothes
Show us how to be.
Change us; transfigure us
So that this world might see what we have just seen, and worship you.*

Amen.

Safiyah Fosua <http://www.gbod.org/worship/>