

Three Chopt Presbyterian Church  
February 14, 2010  
Luke 9:28-36 (see below)  
Transfiguration Sunday  
Dr. Brenda Halbrooks, preaching

Debbie looked out the window of her office and squinted against the bright African sun. She leaned over, trying to distinguish the figure walking past. Then she nodded her head: "Oh, yes. It is Pastor John. And I see that he is carrying a child – it looks like Sarah's daughter, her 15 month old." Debbie smiled, because this was more than the pleasant scene of a man carrying a sleeping child. This was a miracle of transformation.

Debbie is a Presbyterian Mission worker working at the RECONCILE Peace Institute in Yei, Sudan. There are 29 students from 17 different ethnic groups and a variety of church backgrounds coming together to share faith and build peace through worship, prayer and courses on conflict resolution and healing from trauma. Debbie had spotted Rev. John Tubuwa, a Presbyterian Church of Sudan pastor who is Murle, walking past tenderly carrying the child of one of the Nuer students, Sarah Myadach. This is indeed a miracle of transformation.

The Nuer and Murle tribes have been engaged in serious inter-ethnic conflict this past year which has claimed the lives of 1400 and included many abductions of children. How wonderful it was, Debbie writes in her newsletter, to see

"that within 2 weeks time such trust had developed between them: that this Nuer mother trusted this Murle man with her most precious possession - her little girl. John said to me, 'for some reason this baby likes me, wherever I go she wants to follow me.' We are excited not only about what is going on in the classrooms, which is amazing indeed, but the relationships that are formed between these students, who are leaders in their churches and communities, which are breaking down the barriers of ethnicity and serving as foundations for building peace. This is truly of the Spirit!"

Debbie has spoken here at Three Chopt Presbyterian Church in the past. To learn more about her ministry, access the following web site:

<http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/profiles/braaksmad.htm>

.To fully understand the magnitude of this miracle, we need to understand the depth of the conflict in that region of the world. What Debbie saw was truly a miracle of transformation.

The scripture passages for today are narratives of transformation, for today is Transfiguration Sunday.

Now I don't see any greetings cards for sale with "Happy Transfiguration Sunday" printed on them! This is not a Sunday in the church year which is noted in the broader culture. It is, however, the Sunday prior to the beginning of Lent, when the church remembers what happened on the mountaintop as Jesus is transfigured. This event is recorded in Luke 9, Mark 9 and Matthew 17. In each instance, it occurs after Jesus has begun to speak to his disciples about his coming death and resurrection. The Transfiguration answers the question: "Who is Jesus?"

Who is this Jesus? In a previous chapter of Luke, King Herod asks: Who is this Jesus? He has had John the Baptist executed. He now hears about Jesus. Who is this Jesus? A bit later, Jesus asks the disciples themselves: "Who do the people say that I am?" Remember that Peter makes his confession of faith: "You are the Messiah, the one who is to come!" Then Jesus begins to speak about his coming death – and Peter objects. Peter does not want to hear about the death of Jesus and seems not to even comprehend the mention of the resurrection – and Jesus rebukes Peter for this.

Now the Transfiguration. Here is what happens. Jesus takes James and John and Peter up on the mountain to pray. While Jesus is praying, his face changes in appearance and his clothes become dazzling white! Suddenly, two men appear with him – not just any two men, but Elijah and Moses! The men representing the Law and the Prophets! There are also parallels between Moses' encounter with God on the mountain and this Transfiguration of Jesus! Both have their appearance altered, with Moses' face shining so bright he must wear a veil once he comes down the mountain! Elijah and Moses are speaking with Jesus about what is to happen in Jerusalem – about Jesus' "deliverance" literally, "exodus" that is to take place. They are speaking with Jesus about his death and resurrection, these events about which Jesus has begun to speak with his disciples prior to the Transfiguration.

Now here is an interesting aside – the scripture says that Peter and his companions had been weighed down with sleep – their eyelids were heavy and they had a great deal of trouble staying awake – but BECAUSE they had STAYED AWAKE they saw his glory – the glory of Jesus – and the two men standing with him. This is an important point – remember it as we continue.

Elijah and Moses begin to depart from Jesus – the amazing, mysterious moment is not over – there is more to come – but it is quickly changing, transforming and – here is what Peter does! Open-mouth-insert-foot Peter! Impulsive, impetuous, speak-before-you-think Peter!

The scripture says that as "they" –Moses and Elijah – are departing, Peter speaks. Now we know that when Peter speaks it is sometimes "what not to say." Peter says: "Master, Jesus, it is good to be here! Let us make three structures, let us build three buildings, let us commemorate this moment with something material – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah! "----not knowing what he said"! The scripture notes that Peter did NOT KNOW what he was saying. He was babbling, going on, misguided, uttering nonsense,

really and... then... WHILE the misguided words were coming out of his mouth, a second amazing transformation takes place:

A cloud comes and overshadows them. The disciples are terrified. A voice from the cloud speaks and answers the question that is at the heart of this Gospel, the question “Who is Jesus” – the answer “This is my Son, my Chosen, Listen to him.”

When the voice had spoken, all was again quiet, and Jesus was found alone.

Friends, the Transfiguration comes to us in the church at the beginning of Lent, inviting us to be transformed.

Now, we already know about transformation. We know about transformative events that come to us, unexpected, unannounced, not in our life plan. We know about transformations that change our course and threaten to destroy us.

But we also know about another kind of transformation. That is the kind of transformation that we choose to undertake, that we embark on of our own volition, that we agree to and take on and begin. This is the transformation of Lent. Lent is an invitation to be transformed, transfigured, by the power of God. Lent is an invitation to begin a journey of prayer, a path of heightened awareness, a time of acute listening.

Yes, these three things, let us remember them, are important, as we enter Lent. Note how transformation begins with **prayer** – Jesus going up on the mountain to pray, inviting his disciples to join him. Note how transformation requires **being awake** – because they stayed awake, they saw his glory. Oh, how we are tempted to fall asleep! To numb ourselves in various ways, to *not* pay attention to the world around us, to shut out the painful events that occur halfway around the globe, to stay misinformed and focused in frivolity and mindless occupations. Transformation requires being alert, watchful, alive, vital, poised, prepared. Finally, note how transformation comes from **listening**. Peter speaks when he needs to listen in the even humorous description of “while he was still speaking” the man who “did not know what he was saying” was overshadowed by the very cloud of God and his voice drowned out by the voice of the one who declares: “This is my Son, my chosen; **listen to him.**” Do you see it? Peter doesn’t listen; he speaks. God says “listen” instead to Jesus.

Lent, my friends, is a time for transformation. Maybe we won’t transform the world like Debbie Braaksma, working for peace in the Sudan. But, then, let us not dismiss our own call so quickly. The truth is, Debbie was an ordinary church worker in the U.S. who was trying to recruit someone to go to the Sudan and work for peace. One day she was staring at the job description and felt the call herself to fill it. She has spent the past 5 years serving there in Africa. She is about to be transformed herself, for her call is leading her back to the U.S. She leaves behind many who have been transformed through the RECONCILE Peace Institute.

Maybe we can affect transformation in the world, albeit slowly. There are Presbyterians and other people of faith who for decades have been working on debt relief for the poorest nations in the world, including Haiti. Their slow, deliberate work is now paying off as Haiti's debt, which has crippled their development as a nation, is now being addressed by the international community.

Follow these links to learn more about the history of Haiti's debt, what is happening now, and the efforts of people of faith with the Jubilee effort:

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26315908/vp/34833567#34928496>

A press release from last Friday:

[http://www.jubileeusa.org/press/press-item/article/jubilee-usa-welcomes-us-government-announcement-in-support-of-debt-cancellation-for-haiti.html?tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=170&cHash=9c970c906c](http://www.jubileeusa.org/press/press-item/article/jubilee-usa-welcomes-us-government-announcement-in-support-of-debt-cancellation-for-haiti.html?tx_ttnews[backPid]=170&cHash=9c970c906c)

People of faith, working slowly over time, caring about nations and people who were not in the news, are a part of God's transformation in the world.

Friends, God is transforming us as a congregation. Did you know:

We have quietly and without a lot of fanfare opened a Food Pantry that is operating on Tuesday afternoons? Volunteers are appreciated, contact Christine Gray at [hcgray@verizon.net](mailto:hcgray@verizon.net).

We are hosting CARITAS, a ministry with the homeless, housed in our facility the week of March 6-13; to assist, contact the church office.

We continue, in quiet and ordinary ways, to care for those who are sick, to encourage those caring for aging parents, and to comfort those facing traumatic life events, through our deacons, our Stephen Ministers and through our love for each other.

We are also looking at ways to nurture young adults in the faith and to strength families raising children.

God is at work, within us and through us. Let us enter the season of Lent with:

- (1) Prayer as we
- (2) Stay Awake and as we
- (3) Listen for God's voice.

Amen.

## **Luke 9:28-43**

<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And

while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.