

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for Transfiguration Sunday
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
February 14, 2021
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“Minuet in D Minor”

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church. Happy Valentine’s Day to Everyone!

This is Transfiguration Sunday, and the season of Lent begins this week on Ash Wednesday. This year, eight of our churches in Albany Presbytery are joining together for this special recorded service for Ash Wednesday. Because we will be worshipping from our homes, you are invited to have ashes or oil or water to make the mark of the cross on your forehead or the back of your hand.

Ashes are a traditional symbol of repentance and a reminder of our mortality - if you have a fireplace you may have ashes easily available, you might also consider using dirt (be sure if you have potting soil that it does not contain fertilizer or other chemicals that are not meant to be put on your skin), or something else that would make a smudge.

Oil and water are also important symbols of our faith, so if you do not have ashes, you may use some kind of baby oil, mineral oil, or olive oil to make the mark of the cross. Or you could use water. Our worship service will focus on how each of these symbols is part of our faith journey.

The service also includes the Lord’s Supper, so you may want to have some kind of bread or cracker or chip, and some kind of drink, juice or wine or water, to participate in that part of the service.

The link to the Ash Wednesday service will be emailed out Wednesday morning, along with a written bulletin, so you can worship any time on Wednesday. We hope this joint service will be a blessing for all our churches!

Call to Worship

Second Corinthians 4:6

God who said, “Out of darkness the light shall shine!” is the same God who made light shine in our hearts to bring us the knowledge of God’s glory shining in the face of Christ.

Hymn

Choir

“Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies” #462 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, you are the ground and source of our being, yet we too often seek our fulfillment elsewhere. We pursue vain idols that promise us happiness, but cannot help us in times of trouble. We ignore your power that can do anything, and your gentle hand that calmly and quietly offers your gifts of grace. We are a people of clamor and noise, so your gifts often wait for us in vain. Too often we pull into ourselves, with pain and confusion as our companions, hungering for your love. For all the moments that we

have lived as if we did not need you, for all the times that we have ignored your willing love, we ask your forgiveness. O God, as we gather to worship, we pray that your Word will touch our hearts, and your light will illumine our lives. May your majesty and mystery open us again to your presence; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ: the love of God can unfold our pain, un-crush our souls, and increase our hope, so that we may be transfigured and find a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Gospel Lesson Mark 9:2-9

{Jesus has been teaching and healing, traveling to different places. He and his disciples have come to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, where he continues to instruct them.}

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how Jesus told his friends to talk about God's love after his resurrection. Today is Valentine's Day, when we share love with others. Since we are Jesus' friends, we want to share the good news of God's love, so everyone will know: "You are loved!" Now it's time to see the photos that remind us of God's love and hope and joy. {photos.}

Keep sending us your photos so we can share them in the coming weeks!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for friends and family who teach about your love, because they love us and we love them. Help us to learn more and more about your love, and help us to share the good news of your love with others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Epistle Lesson Second Corinthians 4:3-6

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Sermon

This story of the transfiguration of Christ is one that is meant to be enjoyed, wondered at; one that should delight us with its mystery. It is not a text that is meant to be picked apart or analyzed for practical information. In this story, we are taken to the heart of the Christian faith. As Bishop Willimon says, Christianity is a revealed religion. That means it is not something that we think our way into; rather, it is something that is shown to us.¹

When the disciples experience this amazing scene, with Jesus, Moses, Elijah, the dazzling light, the voice from heaven, Peter says, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." And they worship.

I wonder if something like this has ever happened to you; if so, I bet it is not something you talk about very much. It can be difficult to share those experiences, because people don't always welcome them – sometimes they look at us like we have gone a little bit crazy. Bishop Willimon tells of a time when it happened to him. He was walking into an art museum and saw a painting by van Gogh: a tree aflame with rich, thick colors. It seemed to open its arms to him, to be leaning toward him, to somehow be a shout of great and glorious praise. He stood in front of the painting, utterly transfixed. It seemed to him that, in that tree, van Gogh had peeled away the outer layer that covers the natural world in order to expose the essential, innermost reality of the world; as if he had gone from the natural world to expose the supernatural. Willimon felt it was a moment of worship, where he wanted to cry out, "Lord, it is good that I am here!"¹ Our friend, Larry Deyss, has told me a similar story of a painting in the Chicago Art Museum – "White Crucifixion," by Marc Chagall – where he was completely mesmerized and felt he could not move away from it.

There is a famous story from Thomas Merton, who was a Trappist Monk in Kentucky in the 1950's and 60's.² He was in Louisville one day, on a routine business trip, and this is what he describes:

[A]t the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that would could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness... This sense of liberation...was such a relief and such a joy that I almost laughed out loud. And I suppose my happiness could have taken form in the words: "Thank God, thank God...."

[I]t was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed....

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God Himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race....

[I]f only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained.

There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

I have a story like this, too. It was during my first year of graduate school. A relationship was ending badly, I was struggling through Hebrew, I had no job lined up for the summer – it was that time of year where winter was transforming into Spring, just gray and gloomy and cold. I was walking down the street, feeling miserable, when I glanced up to the yard I was passing, and saw these small, purple flowers. They were ground cover, something common to every yard. They had five petals, and somehow, in that moment, it was like they were dozens of little hands, reaching out to me, giving me some message of hope in the midst of the gloom. I stopped on the sidewalk, and just stared at them. In the wonder of that moment, I had that same kind of feeling, “Lord, it is good that I am here.”

Scripture speaks of worshipping God, “in the beauty of holiness.” (1 Chronicles 16:29) God’s holiness is beautiful to behold. Beauty has a way of reaching out to us, seizing us, creating in us wonder and adoration. Which is what worship is.

The word “worship” comes from the old Anglo-Saxon “worth-ship.” To worship means to recognize and respond to the truth worth of something – to see and adore the value of¹ something that is right in front of you, maybe something you have seen many times before.

Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain occurs in the middle of an ordinary narrative about the events down in the valley – Jesus had been in Caesarea Philippi for six days, where he was teaching, as usual. There had been nothing unusual, no healings or miracles. Then, on top of the mountain, the ordinary gave way to the extraordinary, the normal became spectacular. And for a shining moment, the disciples saw and believed¹ and worshiped.

Was the transfiguration a glimpse of the supernatural? Or is that how the world really looks, when seen through the eyes of faith? Maybe everything would look like a miracle, if we had the eyes to see. Maybe that is a definition of faith: the ability to see what is really going on beneath the surface.¹

I remember several years ago, when we did our “Spiritual Mystery Tour,” and many of you shared a time in worship called “My Spiritual Moment.” Those were your stories where you saw something different – something beneath the surface of the everyday – something where you felt God touch your life in some undeniable and amazing way.

I think that is part of why we come to worship. Our vision gets dulled by the ordinary ways of everyday life. So we come hoping that the veil will be pulled back, the curtain will be lifted and for a shining moment, we will be able to see the world as it really is¹ – we’ll be reminded of those moments of standing at the altar with our beloved, of holding a new baby, of seeing Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon or the expanse of the ocean, or a painting, or a yard full of flowers – something that catches our soul, reminds us that God’s reality is just under the surface of our ordinary everyday lives.

We are hungry for beauty.¹

In worship, we are reminded that there is more beauty than we notice at first glance. The Kingdom of God is already here, everywhere in the world. In worship, we are reminded it is true. But we can find anywhere, in the midst of ordinary outings, people, and moments.

The season of Lent takes us through some of the darkest moments of this world, and I think we have the story of Transfiguration now, so that we can remember in our darkest moments, that God is still there, that, just behind the veil is the Light that leads us through the darkness.

Keep your eyes open and your hearts open, and the beauty of God will reach out and capture you, maybe when you least expect it.

This is the Word of the Lord for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Song

Choir

“Shine, Jesus, Shine”

Pastoral Prayer

O God, as we consider all the ups and downs of life, we recognize there are many reasons to give thanks: For the lengthening of days with the passing of winter; for the beauty of the starry sky and the assurance that you undergird and sustain the entire universe; for the example of the saints who have departed this life, and for the blessing of the saints still in our midst who strengthen us with their example, and fill us with the hope of your kingdom.

O God of mercy, we know you love us, and though some seasons in our lives contain difficulty and challenge, we trust that you are present, working good out of what seems wrong. We pray, O God, that you will shine your transforming light into the darkness of this world. Bring peace to the places in turmoil, bring food to the hungry, give shelter to those without homes, bring comfort to those who grieve, and courage to those who live in fear.

We pray that your transforming light will bring healing to those who are ill. We pray for those who are sick and hospitalized. We remember those who live and work in nursing homes and care facilities. We pray for those who are in the midst of medical treatments. We pray for those who are ill in mind and in spirit and in need of care but continue to resist. We pray for those who are anxious or frustrated in trying to get vaccines, and for all who are working in this massive endeavor.

We pray that your transforming light will touch the many relationships that are broken – between husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters. Restore friendships with patience and forgiveness.

We pray for those whose faith has been challenged by the difficulties of this world. Help us to be bearers of hope and friends of Jesus, and use us to bring healing in this world.

Hear us now, as we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

“Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory” #73 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

Sisters and Brothers, God instructed Moses to take up an offering from everyone whose heart moves them to give willingly and ungrudgingly. (Exodus 25:1-2)

Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries of doing God's work in a broken world. If you are able to mail in an offering, or give online at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful for that gift of financial support. If all you can offer is prayers, we love you for the gift of that spiritual support for our church, and for our ministry in this community and in the world. We are blessed to share our gifts and to love one another. Thank you for your generous giving!

Song of Praise

Ryan Dwyer

These are probably the most-sung lines in the last 300 years, so here are both the traditional words, and another variation:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures high and low;
Praise God, in Jesus full known:
Creator, Word, and Spirit one.

Benediction and Blessing

As Jesus called the first disciples, so he calls to us this day, saying, "Follow me." Our gentle shepherd has been revealed as Light. So let us take the Light with us, that all may see the glory of God active in the world. And may the blessing of God go with you, and all those whom you love, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

May God's blessings surround you each day
As you trust Him and walk in His way.
May His presence within
Guard and keep you from sin,
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

"Minuet in D Minor"

Sermon Notes

¹ William H. Willimon, "Transfiguration," in Pulpit Resource, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2006

² From Thomas Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander