**Homily for February 19, 2023 Mark 9:2-9 “Out of the Shadows and into the Sun”**

*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, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 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.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. 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.*

Maya Angelou famously said, “When someone shows you who they REALLY are, believe them the first time.” That level of honesty doesn’t traipse along too often, right? When someone *really* opens their truest self to you, believe them. It seems like advice that is easy to take, but no, not at all. We humans are so mired in our projections and expectations of others, so devoted to others being what we need or desire them to be, that believing *their* deepest self-revealing slides to the back burner. This can have disastrous results, of course…we hear of battered and abused women and men, too, and say to ourselves, “I would never put up with that!” But the statistics tell a different tale…on average, it takes a battered person NINE escape attempts before they can finally break free emotionally from their tormentor. If only they had taken their partners sad self-revelation to heart; that first slap, first kick, first punch, is an announcement of the character of the aggressor. “When someone shows you who they REALLY are, believe them the first time.”

I only bring this painful human habit up because it gels so well with this story we have just heard of Jesus and his three closest students, Peter, James, and John. They went off by themselves, elevated on a mountain top, and while they were there, Jesus revealed to them his truest nature. That is, and always will be, the primary function of the place apart, to share truth that the world cannot sustain or honor. It is the very meaning of sanctuary, that place set apart for truth-sharing and soul-baring. And just like we don’t blurt this kind of stuff out in a crowded restaurant, we don’t include just *anybody* in these rare revealments; we seem to intuitively know the truth of what Mark Twain said: “Never tell the truth to people who are not worthy of it.”

So, they went up there when they finally needed to, in Jesus’ opinion; their shared ministry has been evolving, and they have seen things no human had e’er before seen. Miracle upon miracle upon healing upon blessing, blindness eliminated, hearing restored, suffering assuaged, hungry thousands miraculously filled. And folks were just turning themselves inside out trying to figure out this Jesus, and who he was, and how this stuff was possible. It all came to a head a few verses before this passage, when they have the big discussion about who people *think* he is, and who the disciples think he is, and finally, he decides that a picture really is worth a thousand words, so up the mountain they go. But not the crowd, and not even the apostles; just the trusted few who deserve the truth.

What they saw up there we have come, historically, to call transfiguration. The Latin idea of *figura* can mean image, or face, or even the overall appearance of a person. To this day Italians cherish the notion of *la bella figura*, the beautiful image, look, or appearance. And so ferreting out the meaning of trans-*figura* is not too hard; the image or the face is changed, transformed, and in this case, transformed into a churchy word that we use accurately far too seldom. What they saw up on that mountain was the glory of God. And the glory of God is, literally, the light of Love, an energetic manifestation of the purest aspiration we spirit-sparked critters are capable of.

Interestingly, as they are descending back into everyday reality, Jesus cautions them *not* to tell others about this rare and intimate experience. Others can never *really* understand, right? Never tell the truth to people who are not worthy of it, right? But after his resurrection, they would have added strength in their arguments and assertions that Jesus was God in the flesh. So he tells them, keep this to yourselves, just for now. Hold the truth of this light, just for now, and when the time for revealing has come, you will know it. I sometimes fear that, of all the words in scripture to take literally, modern Christians may have taken this secrecy a bit too far. ‘Tell no one’ was a time-sensitive commandment, not an eternal one. And since most of us are shy of talking and sharing about Jesus in the public sphere, we need to take this transfiguration stuff more seriously. If we are devoted to telling no one, we will need to base our outreach on the witness of our lives more than the absent or reluctant witness of our words.

Tree houses or mountain tops or locker rooms or spa days with the girls, it’s all the same, friends; we show our true colors to those we love most in those sacred places. To the three closest friends, Jesus settled all the bets as to who or what he was in those radiant, luminous moments. He revealed his inner light, his real self, which was, like God, comprised of purest love. To say that this kind of thing is rare is quite the understatement, but we all have seen dilute versions of the transfiguration. *All of us* have seen them, and many of us have been part of them, maybe even been the one glowing with love. We have seen, or been, the bride, the groom, the lover, the parent, the grandparent. We have seen the love glowing when the newborn, slippery little baby is handed over to her exhausted mom. We have seen the family love glowing when the child returns from military service. We have felt the love flowing at weddings and christenings and ordinations and births and deaths, too. We saw it yesterday at Walt Humphreys memorial service. Get a good look at any surviving spouse or partner when their beloved is being laid to rest; look beyond the grief, and you will see the glimmering presence of God, Love in the form of light.

We conclude the season of Epiphany today; its primary image of the star, and illumination, giving way to Lent and its primary image, the cross, and its sacrificial love. In our sanctuary, if you can remember so long ago, these two are most properly arrayed, for the cross is always behind the star, just as sacrifice is nearly always behind radiant love. In fact, in our sanctuary, the lighting is expressly designed to cast shadows of the cross, transfiguring it from a single construction of wood and stained glass into the very image of Calvary, with three crosses arrayed. This is a rather subtle illustration of the very core of our faith; that as fervently as we seek the light, we must also fervently accept that this wisdom and illumination are not without cost, and sometimes painful cost at that. Shine some light on your Christianity, friends, and you will see the shadows of sacrificial love. Our groundhog a few weeks ago may or may not have forecast the coming spring with any accuracy, but shining light on our own lives and habits will always reveal the shadows of sacrifice, or the absence of them.

And so, as we wend our way into Lent, I hope you are still seeking the light. I hope that the darkness of this world has not sold its pack of lies to you entirely. And I hope that you are not too busy for tree houses and mountaintops and sanctuaries, sacred places set apart for being the real, vital, vibrant you. Jesus felt the need to reveal his truest nature to those he cared about the most, and that is a pattern that we should not just borrow, we should steal! For it is in the sharing of our light that we encourage others, upbuild others, energize other, and illumine others. It is why we are here, frankly; to give glory to God through the revealing of *our* inner glory, our inner light and hope and love and truth. Without giving our Paradise brethren gloating rights, it seems nevertheless true that we all spend too much of our time on the valley floor, with all the dust and debris of daily, grinding life. We need to go to the mountain when we are called; to invite others to come aside with us when the revealing time is right. And when we are there, in those places of trust and truth, we need to let people see God in us. Amen.