

## **“Seeing Things Differently”**

**Luke 9:(27)28-43; Exodus 34:29-35**

**March 3, 2019 Transfiguration Sunday**

Have you ever seen someone out of context and it throws you for a moment? Back when Annie was a little girl, she had constant ear infections and the doctors decided that she needed to have tubes put in her ears. So we went to the ear, nose and throat specialist and they took her in for the procedure while Erin and I sat out in the waiting room. But on the other side of the room was a woman that we knew. But we didn't know how we knew her. But we knew her. So we began to whisper back and forth to each other. We didn't know her from church, she wasn't a neighbor. Did we know her from school, did we have kids in the same class? No. Did we know her from piano or music lessons? No. But we knew her, we were sure of it, but where? Finally we engaged her in conversation and tried to find out. And finally we figured it out. She was a checker at Meijer. And since in those days we went to Meijer it seems like every other day, we had her as our checker at least once a week. But it took us a while to figure out. Because we were seeing her in a new way, in a new context. Peter, James, and John must have had the same kind of moment when they saw Jesus on the mountaintop. Was this the Jesus they knew? Hanging with Moses and Elijah? They were seeing him in a new light.

This experience changed their way of looking at Jesus. Even though they had been warned a few days before—there are some of you here who will not see death until you see the kingdom of God—they were not ready for this. They may have believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, but did they really? This was God made manifest, God dwelling among them. Before this they had seen Jesus as a wonderfully insightful rabbi who had healing abilities, but now—who was this guy really? Here he was with Moses and Elijah, the traditional representatives of the Law and the Prophets, each giving their affirmation to Jesus. And Jesus was shining, just like Moses' face had shone after speaking with God. They begin to realize that the human being they know as Jesus is also God, fully human, fully divine. To know Jesus is to know God. And their view of God had changed too. If God was made

manifest in Christ, then God was no longer that figure up in the clouds directing things from on high. God is present in their lives because Jesus is present in their lives. God has come to be with them. In later years, when the church speaks about “incarnation” this is what they mean, God with us.

But what about their view of people? Did that also change? If God is involved in human lives, if he becomes human himself, then humans must be of value or God wouldn't bother with us. As Moses and Elijah can reflect the glory of God radiating from Jesus, can't we do the same? As Paul says to the church in Corinth, “and all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.” Do we reflect the glory of God? Do people see God when they look at us? Do we? Do we see each other that way? Do we see the glory of God in each other's faces?

There is a story that I have told before. I have shared it with the session and the staff because I believe that it is one that it is important for them to keep in mind. It is called The Rabbi's Gift. The story concerns a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Once a great order, as a result of waves of anti-monastic persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rise of secularism in the nineteenth and twentieth, all its branch houses were lost and it had become decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left in the decaying mother house: Abbott and four others, all over 70 in age. Clearly it was a dying order.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a Rabbi from a nearby town occasionally used for a Hermitage. Through their many years of prayer and contemplation the old monks had become a bit psychic, so they could always sense when the rabbi was in his Hermitage. "The Rabbi is in the woods, the Rabbi is in the woods once again," they would whisper to each other. As he agonized over the imminent death of his order, it occurred to the Abbott at one such time to visit the Hermitage and ask the Rabbi if by some possible chance he could offer any advice that might save

the monastery. The Rabbi welcomed the Abbott at his hut. But when the Abbott explained the purpose of his visit, the Rabbi could only commiserate with him. "I know how it is," he explained. "The spirit has gone out of the people. It is the same in my town. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore." So the old Abbott and the old Rabbi wept together. Then they read parts of the Torah and quietly spoke of deep things. The time came when the Abbott had to leave. They embraced each other. "It has been a wonderful thing that we should meet after all these years," the Abbott said, "but I have still failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me, no piece of advice you can give me that would help me save my dying order?" "No, I am sorry," the Rabbi responded. "I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you." When the Abbott returned to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, "well, what did the Rabbi say?" "He couldn't help," he Abbott answered. "We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving - it was something cryptic - was that the Messiah, the Christ, is one of us. I don't know what he meant. " In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the Rabbi's words. The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that's the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the Abbott? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant father Abbott. He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant brother Thomas. Certainly brother Thomas is a holy man. Everyone knows that Thomas is a man of light. Certainly he could not have meant brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times. But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people's sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the Rabbi did mean brother Elred. But surely not brother Philip. Philip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Philip is the Messiah. Of course the Rabbi didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? Oh God, not me. I couldn't be that much for you, could

I?

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off, off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect. Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends. Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one ask if he could join them. Then another. And another. So within a few years the monastery once again became a thriving order and, thanks to the Rabbi's gift, a vibrant centre of light and spirituality in the realm.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe one of us. Maybe you. Maybe me. Seeing Christ in one another. When the disciples come down the mountain, they join Jesus in caring for and healing the crowds, not just because of who Jesus is, but because they have seen the reflection of Christ in one another. Do we? When we sit here with each other, is there a glow behind each face because Christ may just be present in each of us? When we go out, do we see the face of Christ in all those we meet? Do we serve and work in the world because by serving each person we are serving Christ himself? The rabbi was right. Christ is still in the world. The Messiah is here. Maybe we have a hard time seeing him, because we don't expect to see him in one another, but the Messiah is one of us. Or maybe the Messiah is all of us.

<sup>1</sup> Peck, Scott. *The Different Drum*.