

Epiphany Last
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The Path of Transfiguration

Did you know that Albert Einstein played the violin? He was really good at it, too. He played the piano as well. According to Brian Foster in an article in *Physics World Magazine* from January of 2005, music was a lifelong passion for the great physicist. Not only did it help him relax, it helped him work. It gives me this image of him, sawing along through a piece by Mozart when he suddenly stops, grabs a pencil and starts scribbling away until he gets to his famous $e=mc^2$, and then, out of pure joy, he picks up the instrument again! The fact is, a lot of scientists are also artists, Leonardo da Vinci, John James Audubon, and Louis Pasteur, to name just 3.

What do you do when you find out something unexpected about someone else? Have you ever had that happen to yourself? Something you didn't know you could do, a hidden talent that comes to light? There was a time when I thought I not only didn't like preaching, but couldn't do it. Now I believe I can—in fact, I enjoy it, and you will be the judge of how good I am.

However, that is in very small contrast to the revelation to Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. There, something glorious is manifest about him, something so huge, so incomprehensible, so impossible, that Jesus tells them not to tell anyone. It will be quite some time before it really sinks in, and how important it was that it not be misrepresented. What was revealed about Jesus on that mountain was something eternal, something always and everywhere true, such that they didn't really grasp until they encountered the risen Christ and began trying to explain what happened in those encounters. I can see them saying, "Wow, I never realized!"

So, what was that something? It is this: that this Jesus, God with us, divine being in human form, is out to do something within time, but also beyond time. His life, his works of power and his teaching give voice to the perennial wisdom of the great spiritual traditions of the world. His death and resurrection will reveal not only the nature of the God who creates us, but of ourselves as well. I wonder if the disciples weren't terrified, not so much because they didn't understand, but because they actually almost did!

The kicker is, Jesus was not revealing something unique only to him. He was showing us our own path as well. How do we walk that same path? I don't know a single person who has stood on a mountain and experienced what the disciples saw that day, but in other ways, we do walk that path. We believe that God is healing and restoring the world, and that WE are recipients and participants in that healing and restoration. The transfiguration pulls back the curtain on God's vision for the world.

A number of years ago, when the Most Rev. Michael Curry began his ministry as our Presiding Bishop, he introduced an idea that has been growing and developing ever since, a framework by which to understand and walk in this great transfiguration. He calls it Beloved Community. On your bulletin fronts you have a picture of a labyrinth with words around the sides, four labels, four tasks, four challenges to be taken up in this great work of becoming Beloved Community. A labyrinth is appropriate, for a labyrinth is not a maze, it is a spiritual path of transformation, and that is what this is.

- Telling the Truth
- Proclaiming the Dream
- Practicing the Way
- Repairing the Breach

Let's unpack those a bit.

Telling the Truth: Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth," and in today's political arena, it's the question of the day. Polls say what people believe, and you get different results, depending on who is polling, how the questions are phrased, and how they sample the population, and of course, how the data is interpreted. But ultimately, truth is not up for a vote.

In recent episodes of *Finding Your Roots*, with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Lamar Burton found out some uncomfortable truth. His 3-greats grandfather was a white man who fought for the South in the Civil War. His response was priceless. At first, he was shocked, and then he was amazed. Finally, when Gates asked him how he felt, he said that a door was opening for him. He wanted a way to connect with his White friends, but felt cut off. Now, with this kind of White ancestry in his own story, there is a common ground, an opportunity to tell and hear truth on both sides. The story of the Transfiguration is part of the Christian truth. It tells us that there is an eternal dimension to us all, each and every one, regardless of race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender, or any of those other things we use to divide the human family up into groups, something we Christians recognize in Jesus, and toward which we all are being called by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Burton found a door for dialog in his physical story. We find ours in our spiritual story.

Proclaiming the Dream: In Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's famous speech, "I Have a Dream," He said those famous words, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." In a piece published by CBS on January 20, 2023, His daughter Bernice King says, "When he talked about the beloved community, he talked about everyone bringing their gifts, their talents, their cultural experiences," she says. "We live in a society where we may have differences, of course, but we learn to celebrate these differences." The article goes on to note that the social situation has changed since

the 1960's. Bigotry, once widely accepted, has been driven underground. There is a move among African Americans to dismantle Affirmative Action, because it assigns value based on race rather than qualifications. The whole racial dialog has shifted.

So, what is the dream? I think each of us is going to conceive of the dream in our own way, but if what the disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration is an expression of a dream, then it calls for a recognition of the divine spark present and potential in each person we encounter. It calls for a recognition that no one culture has a corner on righteousness, nor a predisposition to damnation. What if our penal system were to finally understand this? Our redlines and our jerrymandering nonsense?

Practicing the Way: In the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going away, but that they will follow. Thomas responds, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus replies, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Through Christian eyes, all ways to God are also seen in Jesus. All truth is reflected in Jesus, and true life is known in Jesus. This is not a claim to exclusivity. Here, Jesus stakes a claim in the perennial wisdom of the human race, shared by spiritual traditions around the globe since the beginning of human spiritual experience.

So what is that way? Just as the Transfiguration is only understood in light of the resurrection, the Way is only understood in light of the resurrection. Jesus' self-giving love, stronger than death itself, the grounding power behind existence, is the way.

What does that look like? How many of you watched our Presiding Bishop's sermon at the marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle? I have watched it several times. He brings out all the gusto and energy of the Black preaching tradition, smack dab in the middle of the beautiful and traditional chapel at Windsor Castle, (to the clear delight of Meghan and her mother, and the obvious discomfort of a bunch of stuffy English Lords and Ladies) to declare how this celebration of love is one manifestation of the great Love of God, manifest best in how we love one another, and how we fight against all the ways the world mitigates against the way of self-giving love.

Practicing the way means being that eternal truth seen manifest in Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, by centering self-giving love in our relationships, in our social action and in our political engagement. Your ego sees the world through your own eyes and cares for you accordingly. Your spirit has the superpower of being able to see the world through another's eyes and love them accordingly.

Finally, Repairing the Breach: An absolutely stunning couple came to see me many years ago. She was from Argentina. He was an African American soldier stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. I was rector of St. Christopher's, Killeen, the "Army Town" close by. Neither was Episcopalian. She had been raised Roman Catholic and he, Baptist. They came to me because they had gone to 10 other churches in town and were told that they

would not perform an interracial marriage. My heart sank. I was confused and angry at my spiritual siblings, and I felt compassion for this couple. Needless to say, we married them. She attended regularly after that—his work schedule got in his way. When he left the Army they moved to Austin and joined an Episcopal church there. We married them because they were a couple deeply committed to one another who wanted a Christian marriage. We married them because we were proud of this couple, reaching across cultural and racial lines, and healing age-old wounds.

It reminds me of my son's sister-in-law and her husband. They can have kids, but have chosen to adopt instead. They have two, a boy and a girl. The girl is of mixed African American descent, and the boy is mixed Hispanic. They began alternating Sundays at an American Methodist Episcopal Church, mainly African American in make-up when they first got little Jane. They wanted to learn how to raise a black child.

During Lent we will be delving into a new book that Skagit elder Jay Bown is writing. In it he tells the story of his great-grandfather, born in 1790, from whom he gets his Lushootseed name. He gave me a pre-publication copy and asked me what I thought. My thought is that I want to share it with you. Last year we did cross-cultural training modules during Lent. This year we are going to try to put feet on what we learned by reading excerpts of this work and trying to peek into the Skagit peoples' world. When I told Jay what I wanted to do he said, "of course. The book's purpose is to build bridges."

How do you repair the breach? By gently, carefully and respectfully, tentatively and slowly, reaching out across the divides, being always willing to give and receive, and to be changed by the encounter. Then, embrace brave conversations with our differing friends about the breach on a larger level, issues like reparations, traditional lands, generational wealth, educational inequities, and all the ways that the breach is woven into the fabric of our society and our economy.

If the Transfiguration is our path, too, then our society must also be transfigured, so that it becomes more and more the Beloved Community God dreams of.