

Order of Worship

Kensington Presbyterian

2022-02-27

Transfiguration Sunday

Welcome and Land Acknowledgment

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

I am speaking from the unceded lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation, who are the traditional caretakers of this island

Announcements

Communion on March 6th; First Sunday in Lent

Annual meeting on March 20th

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world"

Jésus dit : « Je suis la lumière du monde »



Call to worship

From Psalm 99, Responsive

Leader: God reigns; let the peoples tremble! God is enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth shake!

People: *We will extol you, O God, and worship at your holy mountain; for you our God are holy!*

Leader: Let us worship God!

Hymn: 321 "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

Prayer of Approach

Touch us by the power of your presence, O Triune God. As we worship You, may we know what your will is for us, and in surrender to Your will and purpose for us, that we may truly know Your shalom, the perfect peace that comes from a true and deep connection with You, completely trusting in Your loyal, faithful steadfast love.

Loving and merciful God, hear our confession. We do not always engage the other in love, justice and compassion as you ask us to do; we do not always listen to your commandments, obfuscating the truth therein; sometimes we find it too easy to shoot arrows at others from the shadow of anonymity of social media; sometimes we try to escape from all peoples who you love and for whom you gave your life. Forgive us Lord.

Assurance of Pardon

The truth is this: As the heavens opened on the Mount of Transfiguration upon Jesus, God spoke and proclaimed, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" Listen therefore to him proclaim to all of us in the words of John the Apostle that in confessing our sins, he has forgiven us. Indeed: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Lord's prayer (sung)

Hymn 497 "Word of God, across the ages"

Prayer for Illumination

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today.

Intro to the readings

Today is Transfiguration Sunday in the church calendar. The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel readings are from the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all give similar accounts of the transfiguration of Jesus, the few differences being on detail. In all three accounts, prior to the transfiguration, the disciples were just beginning to understand that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed or the Messiah. Peter had already declared in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. After the transfiguration, they remained perplexed as to what Jesus said he was going to do and what the authorities in Jerusalem were going to do to him.

The reading from Exodus ties in with the transfiguration in the sense of typologies. A typology is an Old Testament account that prefigures a New Testament person or event. Moses is a typology of Jesus Christ. Some examples out of the many: both came out of Egypt; both escaped the murderous intent of the monarch; both were at one or another rejected by their own people. Our Exodus reading describes how Moses acquired a portion of the glory of God. After spending time with God on Mt. Sinai, his face emanated a certain radiance that prefigured the infinitely more glorious whole-body transfiguration of Jesus.

The transfiguration of Jesus undergirds Paul's exposition on the nature and high calling of Christian ministry in 2Corinthians, a passage that spans chapter 2 verse 14 to chapter 7 verse 4. The reference to the shining face of Moses is the typological link that stands out in our reading today. Elsewhere within this broad exposition but beyond our reading are more subtle phrases like: "For God... has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6).

Readings

Exodus 34:29-35

2Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36

Sermon: "The Nature of God"

It will be one month shy of 5 years since my last Sunday with you as your Interim Moderator. I am grateful for the invitation, and glad for the opportunity to lead a worship service at Kensington once again.

I have often reminisced of times spent here: of friendships initiated and nurtured; of a great working relationship with the Session; of the excellent music-making, both choir and instrumentalists; of Communion that is uniquely Kensington; and one I will always remember, an afternoon of music to celebrate Kensington's storied history and her long presence and service to the community.

The last time your minister, Rev. Peter, invited me to stand in for him was two years ago right before the Covid-19 lockdowns began. It is significant to me that this is the first time in two years that my wife Grace and I are physically back in a place of worship at all, at the tail end it seems of the myriad of isolation rules meant to keep us safe.

On Thursday morning I did consider reorienting today's church calendar theme from the Transfiguration of the Lord to one more focused about hostilities and aggression between nations. To speak on the Russia/Ukraine conflict would seem timely and appropriate. Yet, it is during these troubled times that we remind ourselves that God is not bound by time, and that it would be good for us to let God speak through ancient Biblical text, relevant then as it is now, and as it ever shall be.

Where are we these days? What is the situation?

You may agree with me that worldwide, Covid-19 has driven a wedge between many of us. For example, I confess I learned to be abnormally annoyed when alongside unmasked individuals in shared spaces. Then there was the protest in Ottawa that if anything, exposed a deep divide among us.

And now that Covid-19 fears finally appear to be waning, Russia invades Ukraine, Vladimir Putin threatening nuclear retaliation against any nation that would dare oppose him. It's déjà vu for me as I am old enough to remember the widespread fear of a nuclear Armageddon brought about by the Cuban missile crisis in the early 1960s.

Our collective angst the last two years just went up by several more degrees.

Why is the world so set against itself? Why do we fight each other? Why do people on opposite ideologies hurl condescension at each other as Ottawa showed us? Why do nations do deadly violence to other nations as Russia just did to Ukraine?

How then may the lectionary readings, revised almost 30 years ago for Transfiguration Sunday, be relevant to our concerns these days? Do they teach us anything that would help us constructively engage the deep divisions that has ever always plagued humanity?

This was the second time Moses was atop Mt. Sinai in conversation with God 40 days and 40 nights. Moses brought up with him two new blank tablets of stone upon which God was again to write His commandments. The first stone tablet edition Moses had tossed and broken at the foot of the mountain out of anger over the fickleness of the Israelites.

This second time with God a new thing happened: some of God's glory rubbed off on Moses that made the skin on his face shine. The people saw it and were afraid and stayed away.

Something in us wants to read into this text that Moses had to veil his face to allay everyone's fear of the glow. Perhaps it is because we instinctively recoil at the warning of death to anyone who looks directly at the radiance of God, an

Old Testament theme. Yet a close reading of this text reveals something different.

First, Moses was initially unaware that his face was emanating some form of radiation.

Second, Moses veiled his face only when he was alone: he spoke to God with uncovered face; and with uncovered face he spoke God's words to the people.

This typology is an allegory on many levels.

When we consider ourselves in our own social circles, getting to really know and understand the other person rests on transparency and honesty. We begin to reveal to each other who and what we truly are. We begin to value the blossoming friendship. We begin to consciously adjust our behaviour towards one another in positive and constructive ways. We begin a fellowship that may become so profound so us to rub off some of us onto each other in reciprocal ways.

I suggest to you that the Law God gave on Mt. Sinai is God's transparent self-declaration of His own nature to us. The Law given is the beginning of the knowledge of who God is. Close contact and communion with God – Moses atop Mt. Sinai for example – builds up that knowledge and understanding of who God is. The more we process and understand God's self-declaration, the more we see that we are God's children and created in God's image. A bit of God's glory rubs off on us so to speak.

As this happens, the more we will unconsciously stand out from the crowd, differentiated from the common ways of the world. Like Moses, God's nature will have rubbed off so much on who we are that we move in God's ways by nature because this has become who we are, often unaware that we have been transformed by God. There no longer is any pretense of religiosity.

What precisely do we learn of God's nature through the Law given on Mt. Sinai? Jesus himself summarized it for us: That God desires that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and that we love our neighbour as ourselves.

I believe you will agree with me that as this God-nature metaphorically rubs off on us, that as we begin to love God with all our being, that as we begin to want to proactively love our neighbour as ourselves, we will indeed begin to radiate this God-nature to the others in our circles of influence. I believe you will agree with me that it is best that we do not veil this God-nature but instead that we live it overtly in all circumstances – God's way has become our way. Perhaps if even those who govern over us were to understand and be guided by these God principles, that we will be more at peace with one another, even among nations. All praise to God

Some of us may ask and rightly so, did not the Apostle Paul warn us in chapter 3 of his 2nd letter to the Corinthians that the Law is the ministry of death? How then can the Law be God's self-declaration? Surely the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not a God of death?

As Paul might say as he did multiple times in his letters: "May it not be so!"

In his letter, first to the Galatians and then to the Corinthians, we may be led to think that Paul dismissed the Law. But later in his letter to the Romans, Paul gave a full explanation in chapter 7. He echoed the words of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 30 when he declared to the Israelites about to cross the Jordan: "Today I am giving you a choice. You can choose life and success or death and disaster." God's nature made known in the Law, is fundamentally life-giving.

What Paul realized and wrote in his letter to the Corinthians was this: "The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me." It turns out that God's nature revealed by the Law points us to God's blinding perfection and seeing this we are ruined. Faced with the convicting power of the Law we resonate with Isaiah the prophet who when he finally saw God revealed, cried out: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."

Moses' shining face prefigured the transfiguration of Jesus the Christ centuries later. In contrast to Moses who by association acquired a portion of God's glory, Jesus was revealed to be the one who radiates blinding glory. In contrast to Moses whose shining face went with him to the grave, we are being transformed from one degree of glory to the next until finally we are face to face with God. It turns out that the complete and ultimate revelation of God's nature that gives life was more than the Law given on Mt. Sinai: God's revelation of His nature is completed in Jesus Christ. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John chapter 1.

Therefore my friends, we who have seen and communed with God through the written Word, we who have beheld His glory, let us eagerly welcome the transformation of our lives from one degree of glory to another, orienting ourselves ever more to God's nature as revealed in the Law, the Prophets and finally and completely in Jesus Christ, unafraid of radiating the glorious nature of God in Christ to anyone God sends our way.

In 1971, the Beatles released the song "Imagine" lyrics by the late John Lennon. In response to that which the song teaches, I say this instead: Imagine all people wholeheartedly loving God; Imagine everyone loving their neighbour as themselves. Will not people then live in peace? Will not the world then be as one?

When Christ was born in Bethlehem, the angels could not contain their joy and proclaimed to the shepherds out in the field:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased.”

My brothers and sisters in Christ, in Christ, God is pleased with us. We are all, each one of us, precious in the sight of God. Let us love the Lord God with our very being. Let us love our neighbour as ourselves. Let us radiate God’s nature around us to all. Let there be peace. It begins with us.

To God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all the glory and praise.



Hymn 376 “Lord, the light of your love is shining”

Prayers of the people

Triune God, Source of all light, wisdom and truth, you make all things new with the radiance of your transforming love. We give thanks for our Lord Jesus Christ who leads us atop the mountain and there reveals to us your will. We give thanks that you speak from the clouds that surround us. We give you thanks for your Spirit who dwells among us, encouraging and empowering us to follow your call for justice and peace.

Continue to nourish us with your Word. Chase away the shadows of doubt that beset us despite Christ’s intercession on our behalf. Give us strength to stand firm in the truth no matter the circumstance. Grace us with your compassion so that we too may be of comfort to those in physical or emotional pain.

Saturate those who govern us with your wisdom so that all may go well according to your will. Cause reasonable minds throughout the world to come together and work out paths to peace. We do pray for the people of Ukraine and of Russia; for their countries and their leaders. We pray for all those in power, that they will choose for all people life instead of death. We pray for those who now live in fear; that you will hold them tightly in this time of war. Bring order to our chaos, O God, and restore us to your path of love and care for all.

As we descend the mountain of God’s revelation, assure us that in whatever circumstance, you are always with us. Remind us in the words of the Apostle Paul that neither death no life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from your love for us, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sovereign God, you who made of one blood all races and nations of earth and sent your Son Jesus Christ to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Pour out your Spirit on the whole creation, bring the nations of the world into you fellowship, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Hymn: 338 "Let all things now living"

Sending & Benediction

May the transfiguring love of God be known in the world – known by the way we live and speak and serve.

May the transfiguring grace of Jesus Christ be shown in us – shown by where and how we live and work.

May the transfiguring power of God's Holy Spirit guide – guide us in ways of justice, mercy, and kindness

May the love, the grace and the fellowship of the Triune God be with you now and always.

