

Sermon: To Bear God's Beams of Love
February 14, 2010, Trinity Church
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Yesh la'nu sheleg maspeek, maspeek, c'var: We have snow enough, enough, already!" (Hebrew)
What a joy it is to come to church without the what have become normal barriers of snow and ice!
Welcome.

In our Scripture readings from today we find ourselves on the mountain top, both in the first testament reading of Moses who encounters God on the mountain and is so radiant with that encounter that he actually has to cover his face with a veil when he comes back down. And then in our reading from Luke's gospel we have Jesus on the mountain with his inner circle of disciples; Jesus' face is changed and his clothing becomes dazzling white as he prays in this scene which has become known through our tradition as the Transfiguration.

In the preceding passage in Luke, Peter has just identified Jesus as the Messiah and in turn Jesus tells his disciples that this means he will suffer, will die and will be resurrected. So this scene on the mountain for Luke is a confirmation of what Jesus has just revealed to his followers. Peter, when he sees Moses and Elijah standing next to Jesus, says to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings (or booths or shelters), one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Peter is relying on his hospitality skills, the things that he knows and has experienced and can fall back on. Peter is trying desperately to make sense of what he is seeing, and just as he is talking about all this shelter building, a cloud overshadows the entire group and a voice, not just any voice but the voice of God, says, "This is my Son, my Chosen. Listen to Him!" This transfigured Jesus is just too much for the disciples to handle. In the icons of the Eastern Orthodox church, the transfiguration usually shows Jesus in all his glory standing at the top of the mountain with a star shining behind him, beaming his radiancy, with Elijah and Moses at his sides and the three disciples sprawled in disorder at the bottom. Peter has his hand over his face, John crouches on his knees, covering his face and James is often flat on his back. It is actually a quite humorous scene in its high drama. They have been physically thrown off their feet at the revelation of Jesus' identity. You see this is not what they had thought the Messiah would be like, for this Messiah would suffer and die and be resurrected.

What the disciples simply cannot understand or appreciate yet is that Jesus's identity as God's son can only begin to be fully understood in the context of the cross and the resurrection. In the transfiguration, we have a theophany or a showing forth of God. Here we have in a short passage foreshadowing and confirmation of the life, death, resurrection of Jesus, the beginning, the end, a body broken and given for others, that they might be made whole. Here we have God's radiant love shown through his son and the light of this love will be reflected in all those in communion with him.

18th century poet William Blake said that our task in life is **"to bear God's beams of love."** To bear God's beams of love. That is what Luke is showing us in the transfiguration- that God's beams of love are continually reaching out to the world in all areas of life, in all stages of life, in all dimensions of life. Luke shows that Jesus' purpose in going up the mountain is to pray and he shows that to pray is to encounter the presence of God. The voice from the cloud that the disciples hear is heard in the context of prayer.

So what does it mean to bear God's beams of love? Perhaps it means to be in communion with God in a way that allows us to receive his love, perhaps it also means to position ourselves in a way that allows us to walk in love in all its fullness and perhaps it means to be God's conduits and to give ourselves away. How do we bear God's beams of love? Jesus received those beams of love as he was in communion with God through prayer and it was through prayer that God's glory was revealed in him. To pray is to change and is the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. And sometimes it is just plain difficult to pray! We may start off the day with all good intentions of praying and find ourselves before we even realize it, running down the road by ourselves, running faster than God himself. We may even think if we go fast enough, in our quest for efficiency, we can get the work done that we need to have done. And then we come to realize we may be running not only ahead of but actually running from God himself, running from those beams of love.

Richard Foster, a well known Quaker writer says, "How often we fashion cloaks of evasion - beam proof shelters - in order to elude our Eternal Lover. But when we pray, God slowly and graciously reveals to us our evasive actions and sets us free from them." I wonder if that is what Peter was doing when he was attempting to build the shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Attempting to build a beam-proof shelter because he couldn't understand the depth and breadth of Jesus' love that would result in his suffering and death and resurrection. Attempting to elude the Jesus who loved him. How do we fashion our own cloaks to evade the God of eternal love? What keeps us from being able to bear God's beams of love? Perhaps it is our hearing old tapes playing in our heads that we are not worthy, that our sinfulness or simply our inadequacies are just too much. Perhaps it is fear, fear of change. Prayer changes us and opens us to forgiveness, forgiveness of ourselves and forgiveness of others. To change might mean to love those in our midst who are difficult to love, the ones we are angry with or the ones we disagree with so strongly ; to change might be to sacrifice our own comfort in favor of others.

Yes, seeing Jesus in all his glory, knowing of his death and his resurrection, in this intimate communion may have landed the disciples in sprawled disorder but Jesus still met them where they were in their imperfection and limited understanding, kept them with him as they journeyed onward to and beyond Jerusalem. In the same way, God meets us where we are in our broken state, in the middle of our imperfection; yes, he meets us here at Trinity Church on Sunday morning but we don't have to wait for Sunday morning to be in communion with him. God is not asking to come into our living rooms after all the bills are paid, after all the laundry is done and put away, after we get into the college of our choice, after we've found the perfect job, after our children's lives have been straightened out, after we have figured out how on earth we are going to help the people in Haiti. He is ready to meet us IN the bill paying, IN the college application, IN the struggles with our children, IN the job search, IN the struggle to help the people of Haiti. As we live into this life of prayer, we move into a place of spiritual health where we are able to receive love and give it to others. Peter, James and John would move into this place of spiritual health as they spent time with Jesus and allowed themselves to be transformed. God's love radiates as we give ourselves back to him and give ourselves to one another.

You undoubtedly have come across people who are radiant with God's love, who just seem to have a holy presence, folks who freely give of themselves. You know, we all have that potential for radiancy within us, too. God dwells within us. It is just a matter of dismantling the shelter around us, the shelter of fear, complacency and disbelief that has kept us hidden from those beams of love. So as we allow God's light and love to dwell in us, let us pray, "Loving Lord, whose love never ceases and is constantly calling out to us, help us to open our hearts and minds, help us bear your beams of love, that we might accept your gracious gift and that we in turn might radiate that bountiful and beautiful love to those around us." Amen.