

Son Glasses

a sermon based on

Luke 9:28-36

(with reference to Exodus 34:29-35)

and delivered on

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Transfiguration Sunday (Year C)

at

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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I've struggled this week trying to come up with a message this week. I picked the title back in December and made some notes. Still... I've struggled. The story of the Transfiguration comes every year on the Sunday just before Ash Wednesday. Shouldn't I have it down by now? You'd think? Right?

But here's the thing. Whenever I've done training for liturgists, in addition to asking them to practice reading everything out loud, I give this instruction (it's an instruction that was shared with me in seminary) – when you stand to read Scripture, read the Scripture; let the Bible speak for itself; don't tell us what the story is or about before you read it. If there is exposition needed, that will come during the message.

On a similar note, I think that sometimes preachers need to be cautious that we don't get caught up in what we want the Scripture to say that we add too much to the story. Having said that, I'd like to turn to these two passages of Scripture – Luke in particular.

Usually, when I talk about Jesus' transfiguration on that mountain with Moses and Elijah standing there beside him – and Peter, James and John as witnesses – we focus on how the revelation of who Jesus really is. He's not just some prophet or teacher – he's not just a messiah (an anointed one), but that he is THE Word that gives meaning to prophecy and teaching – that he is THE Messiah – the Son of God who from before anything was created – precipitated God the Father's initial and renewing blessing upon creation. He is THE agent through whom we are connected to God and discover who we are as human beings – as those made in God's image.

With that in mind – will you allow me to go in a different direction than usual? I'd like to talk about that event from Peter and John and James' perspective. Why did they need to witness this event? I don't think it was a special blessing on them for being the three who were closest to Jesus. I don't even know that they thought that they were particularly privileged in the initial invitation to go up that mountain. Jesus had just sent out seventy of his disciples to preach the good news, to heal the sick and to cast out demons. Maybe I'm projecting, but as a pastor it's almost like receiving the “honor” of being assigned as a district superintendent instead of being allowed to do “real” ministry. There's still honor in that, but it's often so detached from obvious ministry and that immediate feedback – that immediate sense of fulfillment – that the more worldly side of our human nature upon which we thrive.

Maybe this is why Jesus needed to reveal himself to these three this way. They'd learned from the best. They'd been out with those others healing and preaching. But did they really understand what was going on? Did they maybe think that it was maybe think that it was just some hidden ability within themselves that they were able to release after listening to Jesus and watching him? Yes, when Jesus asked the disciples who they said he was, “Peter answered you, the Messiah of God?” (Lk 9:20b) At least that's how Luke (and Mark) record it. In Matthew's account we get a little bit more of Peter's reply to that question: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16:16) Which is a bold statement, because until then – except for the annunciation when Mary is told that her son would be the Son of God – the only ones who call Jesus Son of God are the devil and demons.

They had a different way of seeing things. Because they did, it allowed them to discover ways of manipulating people in ways they might not notice or even if they did only when it was too late.

Do any of you ever wear sunglasses? What kind? I don't mean brand. Do any of you wear polarized sunglasses? What's different between polarized sunglasses and just tinted lenses? Besides the price? Things look differently. Don't they?

Things don't change, but those polarized lenses make things crisper – they help to see more clearly. I'd like to propose that when Jesus took Peter and James and John up on that mountain, it wasn't just to have three witnesses to the event for telling later – but that he did so to give them

Son (S-O-N) glasses that would allow them to see the world and their relationship with God and their role in his kingdom differently – to see things with God’s perspective.

What that would do is that it would reveal to them, that those miracles that were being performed, that those people who were being healed and freed from demonic oppression – that it wasn’t just some untapped power within human nature that Jesus was somehow able to unleash but that it was the power of God himself. So that when healing came through their prayers and hands that they might realize that it wasn’t BY their hands, but by the hand of God working through them.

Witnessing Jesus in his heavenly glory – hearing the voice of God say, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him,” (Lk 9:35) helped them to start seeing the world in a different way. It helped them to realize that Jesus wasn’t a son of God (a term that was used often for kings) – that he wasn’t just a man anointed to be a messiah to restore Israel’s fortune – but that Jesus was God incarnate – and that everything they would do for the sake of the kingdom was only because God was honoring them by working through them.

Isn’t it interesting that the first story we hear after Jesus and the three come down off the mountain is a man begging for him to heal his son because his disciples couldn’t. What does Jesus say? “This kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting.” (Mt 17:21) That is human will isn’t enough, only the power of God can do this. Those other disciples didn’t have on their “Son” glasses. They couldn’t quite see or understand yet what was going on.

The only problem (if you can call it a problem) with those “Son” glasses is that they do keep us from seeing everything from other’s perspective. Think of it this way, have you ever noticed that when you’re wearing polarized sunglasses that it’s harder to read the display on your smart phone or tablet? There’s a reason for that. I’m not going to go into the physics of the matter, but just to point out that those polarized lenses get in the way. So we take them off to see what we want to see on the screen.

I think that happens sometimes when we take off our “Son” (S-O-N) glasses. Maybe we get nostalgic for what was before we welcomed Jesus into our lives and claimed the gift of grace that he bestowed upon us by going to the cross. Or maybe we just forget to put them on some morning. But what inevitably happens is that we start to revert. We start to take credit for the good things God does through us, no longer recognizing that it is God doing the doing. Then we find those things fading away.

When Jesus took Peter and James and John up that mountain, he didn’t reveal his glory just for the sake of showing them who he really was. He took them up that mountain – so that like Moses who’s face was transformed by his interaction with God upon Mount Sinai – like Moses who glowed because God worked directly through him to produce the tablets of the covenant – they too might realize that God had already begun to work in them and that continuing to look at everything around them with God’s perspective that they too would shine his glory on others.

That’s the promise he has for us today. It may seem ironic, when in only three days we will begin a Lenten journey with all of its attention on repentance and retrospection. Except, we remember that even though Peter got to get those “Son” glasses that he knew that Jesus wasn’t just some extraordinary teacher or prophet, that he would end up denying that he had anything to do with him on the night he was arrested. But that same Peter was ready to run to the empty tomb with expectation to witness what God had done.

Jesus promised to be with us always. He promised to send another Paraclete (it means a different person, but the same) who we know as the Holy Spirit to be with us always – a confirmation that the same God who through the Son worked wonders through the disciples –

sometimes in miracles but more often in the retelling of their stories – that that same God through the Holy Spirit will continue to work wonders through us that we can see when we put on our “Son” glasses when look around striving to see as God sees. In doing so, we get to behold the great regard that God has for every soul, and his desire that each person receive the blessing and healing and grace that he or she needs.

When we put on our “Son” glasses we see that God’s intention in the Law and his instructions isn’t to condemn anyone, but to lead us and all people to the fullness of who he made us to be. AMEN.