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Glimpses / now the eyes of my eyes are open
2/14/2021 Transfiguration B

I like the word “glimpses” - it describes so well my experiences of having sudden breakthroughs of special moments of the holy, or faith, of deep joy. You know, we go on and on with the daily tasks - grocery shopping, bathing kids, teaching a class, driving on the expressway, doing our job at work, filing papers, folding clothes, vacuuming, and so on - then suddenly we get this moment of insight, of glory, of a deep smile, ...a glimpse of delight, a glimpse of joy, a glimpse of the holy. Much of our days are doing the things we have to do to keep on living - every once in a while, though, we see beyond it.

The first time I was aware of this happening was a day at the park - I was a teenager, and I suddenly noticed that God put blue and green next to each other in skies and trees - yet my mom would never have let me wear those colors together like that. In my mom’s sense of style, you didn’t wear a blue skirt with a green shirt. (This was before the preppie look put all kinds of colors in plaids) But God did it all over the place. God did it. That moment I saw the colors was similar to that moment in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, that starts in sepia, like old pictures, then some 1-2 minutes in, suddenly it’s in color and Paul Newman has the bluest eyes. Color washed over me that day in the park - the colors of the various wild flowers, the millions shades of green in the various trees, all the colors. It was a wonderful couple minutes of awe and appreciation...before another voice in my head said, “Becky, for pete’s sake, you know the colors!” But for those moments the colors were richer than I’d ever seen - and really, I’ve never forgotten it - it changed the way I see color.

Some other things I’ve felt delight in - the smell of my young kids’ hair, after they’ve been playing outside and are kinda hot - when they would run to me and I’d hug them, I’d always sniff their hair - that smell transports me somewhere. I like it when we’re driving to the ocean and suddenly we’re at that point that I can smell the salt in the air - it's like nowhere else - I’m almost instantly relaxed, just smelling the ocean - I feel the tension go out of my shoulders, I want to roll down the car windows and just breathe in the air. Sometimes there’s a dawn or a sunset that is just glorious, and for a moment, when I let myself appreciate it, I am overwhelmed by the colors in the sky - it’s not a touched up postcard, it’s real.

There are moments with the Scriptures when the Spirit so connects us with the verses that we are reading - where the reality of our communion with one another is felt in a special way, when the connection with the saints from history is a reality, when our connection around the globe with Christ-followers of all colors is a felt reality. When the words written by our faith ancestors turn into a perception of the reality they are trying to convey - the Spirit lifts us from just reading, and we delight in a moment of “getting it.” I told you last week about that special communion service led by a minister very close to dying from cancer, where things got all shimmery when we realized that next time we took communion, he would be rejoicing with us from the other side of whatever mystery death is.

Once in a while I get one of those glimpses during music - where it carries me away, and I am floating on the harmonies or melody. Mostly it's when I'm playing, or accompanying, when things just come together and what I call the “magic” happens, and you never want it to quit. Sometimes, though, as a participant - I remember once at the National Orchestra where suddenly the piece captured me, I was on the edge of my seat, feeling the music - and the whole audience must have been feeling it, too, because we erupted in applause, not just because we were supposed to at the ending, but because we couldn't help it. Once in a poem will capture a special glimpse - like the lines from the poem I used a portion of in our thoughts for the day. Here's the whole thing, by e.e.commings -

i thank You God for most this amazing
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes
(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)
how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?
(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

So those are the kinds of glimpses I think about when I read these verses in Mark - there they are, these special 3 disciples off with Jesus to pray, and for a few precious seconds, the veils of their normal eyes are pulled back, & they're given a glimpse of Jesus as the Divine being that he actually was, besides the enfleshed one they walked, talked and ate with daily. And there with Jesus are 2 of the heroes of the Jewish faith, not dead but living...and shining to dazzle the eyes. We can't look long at those kinds of things - however, we can get glimpses... and we can be assured that there is a bigger story going on around us than we're usually aware of as we go about our work days.

These disciples were given a glimpse of the wonder of creation, a glimpse of God, a glimpse of heaven, a glimpse of the ongoing story God is working out on earth. Their human eyes were stretched by their spiritual eyes for just those moments.

I wonder if that's what Martin Luther King Jr meant when he said God took him up that mountaintop and showed him the other side, where discrimination was a thing of the past. He gave that mountaintop speech the night before he was assassinated in Memphis, supporting the strike by the sanitation workers. Or his "I Have a Dream" speech - he caught a glimpse of how life COULD be if all people knew the point of view of our caring God, and loved each other as God loves us. Maybe God gave him a glimpse of how it could be - enough of a glimpse that he could inspire many others then and since then, when we read his words and see that same glimpse.

On 9/11, I was like 2 weeks into being the Presbyterian campus minister at Old Dominion University, there in Norfolk, VA. Our University President pulled together a service later that very afternoon, where the Jewish campus minister, the Muslim campus minister, Catholic and Protestant campus ministers all stood together at the front of a large, outside assembly, giving witness to the peace that is possible as we each prayed. It was a glimpse of what could be, and we wept that right now the world was missing the mark, and exploding in violence.

Wouldn't it be great if we could daily walk in that same awareness of the divine story unfolding around us? If we could walk all day & every day with that kind of delight, that kind of compassion, that kind of appreciation that those glimpses we've had brought us? If we could carry within our minds the reality that we saw in just those few moments of awe and glory? If

just those glimpses, those brief, luminous encounters with God informed our whole living and understanding of what is real?

Peter wants to build a monument outside to commemorate the moment - instead, the moment has to change them from the inside - Jesus says don't speak of it yet - until you understand more, is what he implies. It's not so much that you had a special sighting - but what has this glimpse done in you? How is what you now know transforming your living? Mark writes that they were terrified - what in the world did we just experience? Rather than classifying it or analyzing it or building monuments to it - let it change you. Let it make a difference in how you look at the world now, how you look at Jesus now, how you look at other people now, how you look at troubles and difficulties now, how you interpret the world now.

From the number of folks who post gorgeous pictures of sunsets or weather systems moving in or double rainbows on FaceBook, I know that many people are captured by the beauty around us, and step outside of their daily grind to be in awe. From the many folks who post pictures of their children and grandchildren, as well as their own grandparents, I know there are many whose hearts are full of love. From those who delight in the ocean, or delight in the antics of their pets, I know that many people have these moments of delight. From the inspired writing that I've read and been moved by, I know there are people who have had moments of great insights of faith and the glory of God. From the many hymns that live in our hearts, whose words and melody speak to us, I know people have tried to capture the bliss of knowing God, or the strength of the Spirit holding them through crises, or moving them to do things outside their comfort zones.

God is good to us in letting us get these glimpses, glimpses that break into our days and hours in assurance, in challenge, in brightness; asking us to stretch our souls and feel the awe of knowing God IS. While we don't build monuments to them, I do hope that these moments change us from the inside, and continue to color our living from that point forward. How wonderful it would be if we could carry that sense of awe and love and connection into all the hours of our days! To live and walk in the reality of God; to not forget even for an hour. Because, of course, my friends, that awe and glory and compassion and connection IS the reality of following Christ. AMEN.

Mark 9:2-10

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with

Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. ⁶For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Psalms 50

¹The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

²Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

³Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around him.

⁴He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people:

⁵“Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”

⁶The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah

⁷“Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God.

⁸Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me.

⁹I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds.

¹⁰For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.

¹¹I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.

¹²“If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine.

¹³Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

¹⁴Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

¹⁵Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”.....

²³Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God.”

2 Kings 2:1-14

2Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. ³The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.” ⁴Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. ⁵The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.” ⁶Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. ⁷Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

⁹When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” ¹⁰He responded, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” ¹¹As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. ¹²Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

¹³He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, “Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.