



EGLINTON ST. GEORGE'S
UNITED CHURCH

"Living in the Light"
A sermon preached by The Rev. Dr. Deborah Hart
at Eglinton St. George's United Church

Sunday, February 18, 2007
Transfiguration Sunday

Readings: Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-36

Last Sunday afternoon here was amazing! Craig Keilburger spoke with passion, telling us the story of Free the Children. More importantly for me, he told of the upbringing he received from his parents who read the newspaper together with their children, exposed them to world issues that in turn helped them each develop a social conscience. That social conscience would lead to action and a commitment to tackle injustice, believing that one person *can* make a difference.

Craig's most recent viewpoint is expressed in a new book, entitled *Me to We*, encouraging us as families and communities to band together for action toward the good. He was slick in his presentation, having researched our congregation, our mission and vision, our outreach work, and support of Marlis and Samantha, young women from our congregation who went to Kenya last summer with a Free the Children leadership program. He knew which schools were represented and the projects in which they were engaged. Close to a hundred lined up afterwards to buy copies of his books and materials, and then waited in line again to have Craig autograph them. I watched as he took his time with each individual, no matter what age, asked questions of them, and made them feel like they really mattered, despite the line-up behind them. He was still here at 5 p.m. doing an interview with a representative of our United Church Observer. Watch for that article in coming months.

It's Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany which began with the story of the magi. Each year the season continues with revelations about Jesus, climaxing in this story of God's glory descending upon him, as he is flanked by Moses and Elijah, the two major representatives of the law and the prophets. There is mystery and intrigue as the scene goes from dazzling light to clouds enshrouding these three with Peter, James and John to witness it all.

For those who put together the lectionary, the assigned weekly readings, this Transfiguration story recalled for them an earlier occasion when Moses was the centre of such dazzling light and mystery. Earlier in the Exodus story Moses had gone up Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments but when he returned he found the people had gone over to other gods in his absence and so in anger he destroyed the tablets. Later he went back for a second copy! Today's story follows that period of Moses being in God's presence on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights.

Both readings today tell stories of powerful encounters with God. They speak of the transcendent, holy, other-worldly nature of God, who comes close to connect with humanity. They describe scenes of bright and blinding light. When Moses returns, he is unaware of his beaming face; but the people are frightened, and so he veils it. The light bestowed on Jesus was more momentary and fleeting, yet indelibly etched in the minds of the disciples privileged to witness the occasion.

As I was doing some reading and research in preparation for today, I came across mention of a C. S. Lewis essay entitled, "Meditation in a Toolshed". It tells the story of Lewis finding himself in



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a dark shed with a beam of light streaming through a small crack in the roof. Apparently Lewis noted that when he looked *at* the beam of light, he saw one thing, but when he changed his position to enter into the beam of light and look *along* it, or *with* it, he saw something quite different. Instead of looking *at* the beam of light, he saw what was *affected* by the beam. He saw the results of the light. In the essay, Lewis uses this insight as metaphor for two different ways of knowing – observational, from the outside, and participative, from the inside.

It occurred to me that if one were to have been present when Moses returned with his face beaming from being in God's presence or with the 3 disciples when Jesus' robes became dazzling white, engulfed with God's glory, then it's likely that we would have been awestruck like the others around us; we would have been blinded by the light and impressed, but then what? Probably we would have come down off the mountain or turned away and returned to daily life, impressed but unsure of what we'd seen, and certain that such a thing would never happen to us.

But if, as Lewis suggests, we shift our focus from directly looking at the blinding light of God, and instead turn around to see what that light is illumining before us, then we have a chance to enter that light and go with its direction. It is such a simple concept, yet for me, it makes all the difference in the world between action and inaction, between feeling hopeless and helpless and overwhelmed, and feeling able to participate in some small way.

When you think of people like Moses or Jesus or during this Black History Month when you think of Martin Luther King Jr. or Rosa Parkes or Nelson Mandela, don't you look up to them but feel you could never be like them? We are blinded by the glory and aura around them. We feel we could never measure up to such greatness. We put them on pedestals and then relapse into our ordinary lives. But what if we were to do as C. S. Lewis suggests? What if we were to turn around and end up facing the same direction as they did? What if instead of being blinded by looking at them, we turned around and let their wisdom and insight and charisma enlighten our path? What if we let their aura wash over us and point the way forward for our day and time? We would have their light and energy behind us to spur us on. A part of God's light that shone in and through those people of faith can be passed on to shine in and through us.

Whatever you think of today's stories and the stories since of people of faith shining brightly with God's glory in their time and age, there seems to be some truth in the fact that those who spend time with God are often changed. They have an aura about them that attracts others to them and their message. And it isn't that their messages are always popular ones. Moses brought news of a whole set of laws that the people were to follow if Yahweh was to be their God. Jesus had just told his followers that his journey would be taking him and them to Jerusalem, where he expected to suffer and die. Parkes and King and Mandela challenged racism; Al Gore, once mocked and considered boring, has persisted with a passion that now makes his message on climate change a leading light that is spurring people, politicians, musicians and scientists around the world to rise up in action. We'll be showing his film "An Inconvenient Truth" here on Friday night March 2nd. And Craig Keilburger is inspiring a whole generation of young people around the world to care about other young people and their living and learning and working conditions. Craig commented on meeting Sister Agnes, who later became Mother Teresa, who told him that we can't all do great things but we can do small things with great love.

We don't each have to be the centre of that beaming blinding light, the "chosen ones" with whom God is well-pleased, but we can bask in their light and be inspired by them to go in the same direction in acting against injustice and oppression, in acting with passion and compassion.



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I listened with joy and some tears last Sunday to Marlis and Samantha as they shared what their time in Africa last summer had meant to them. I watched as other young people flocked to them and to Craig after their presentations to talk to them, see their pictures, hear their stories, and sign up to do something themselves to make a positive difference in the world.

I want to leave you with two challenges today:

The first is to actually take time to be in God's presence each day, whether that is in reading daily scripture or devotional material or in prayer or in silent meditation. If you do so, gradually others will notice a difference in you. You may not glow with the light of Christ or beam out God's message, but quietly and surely your aura will change and others will notice. Your life will begin to align with God's plans for our world and, bit by bit, you will grow in being a disciple, willing to walk whatever journey is presented to you. And your light will shine for others to see, whether you are aware of it or not.

The second challenge is to change your perspective from observer to participator. Instead of being dazzled or blinded by looking directly into the light and feeling you don't understand or can't measure up, turn around and let that light illumine you and your path forward. It's like looking into the marvellous cross and its golden rays in our chancel window on a sunny day and being impressed but then walking away vs. turning around and placing ourselves at the cross with Jesus and others who have suffered and letting their light illumine our way as we look out those windows and doors of our church into the world and seeing where those rays are shining and pointing us outward with passion and compassion.

It was while I was on retreat in Montreal some 9 or 10 years ago, in a time of silent meditation that a particular mantra or prayer phrase came to me to use rhythmically with my breathing in the 20 minute periods of silent prayer. Suggested mantras are often given and we have one that we use on Monday afternoon and evenings in our yoga and meditation groups here. But sometimes a person finds one that is meant for them at a particular time. It's usually very personal but I tell you mine today because I think it speaks to this notion of living in the light and acting with that light. My prayer is simply "in me and through me". As I breathe in, my morning prayer is that God will first work *in* me as I start the day, and then that having worked in me, I breathe out, praying that God will then work *through* me throughout the day in whatever situation and with whomever I encounter. "In me and through me." I pray that often. I switch the prayer more towards God and pray that it is only "in you, God, and through you, God" that I will cope with this day.

"In and through" is my daily prayer: In and through God, and God working in me and through me in this community or wherever I find myself. Each of us needs to find our own prayer, our own way of living in the light and then letting that light live in and shine through us in our various daily contexts. Try out the various words or prayers of people of faith who have gone before you or listen for your own. But let God's light encompass you, not blind you, and let it shine in and through you to others. It's what discipleship is all about. We welcome the 12 new disciples (such a biblical number!) who have formally joined us today, and together may we spread the light in helpful and faithful ways. Our world is waiting.

Amen.