

Transfiguration and Conflict Transformation

Mark 1:1-11, 9:2-8 by Patty Friesen (Feb. 11/18)

In the Old Testament, Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments and scripture says his face shone like the sun. Elijah also went up Mount Caramel to do battle with the prophets of Baal and God rained down fire and burned up the sacrifice. Today, both Moses and Elijah show up to be with Jesus on the holy mountain. And a cloud appeared and a voice said, “This is my Beloved Son, listen to him.” The same words that God spoke at Jesus’ baptism and the inauguration of his ministry in Mark 1 and appear here again to confirm God’s ongoing blessing, power and presence with Jesus. Jesus is the Healing River throughout Mark’s Gospel and throughout these next 7 weeks of Lent, we will explore Jesus’ healing power in bodies and in water, calming storms and walking on water. He is given this power from God above with the confirmation of the great Jewish prophets. No one can deny this power after the Transfiguration.

Jesus was transfigured on the holy mountain– made into something new, but the disciples were transfigured as well. They never forgot it and wanted to hang onto the experience forever. Peter wanted to build three tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah to stay in. Three tents for three prophets and there were three disciples to witness it and tell the story. It was something that happened beyond the veil, beyond that line between the physical world and the spiritual realm. It was so unearthly that Jesus told the disciples not to speak of it until after the resurrection. Maybe Jesus figured if people could believe the resurrection, they could also believe the transfiguration.

The Irish call this kind of place where one experiences the transfiguring presence of God as a “thin place,” where the veil between heaven and earth becomes very thin. In Ireland, there are many thin places or holy places in nature - mountains, and springs that were established there hundreds of years ago by people who recognized a place to meet God. Modern pilgrims continue to visit these sites seeking the mystical presence of God in these natural places. There is no explanation or theology about these encounters, just the incredible peace and mystery that comes to those who seek. Many of us have these experiences of God in nature as well, at Camp Shekinah, or at the lake or walking outside at sunrise or sunset on the prairie.

Beyond encountering sacred spaces in nature, there are other thin places where God is revealed to us and one of the most profound thin places is in meeting and receiving our children for the first time in birth and adoption. This little person who comes to us so vulnerable and in need of our love only swells our own hearts in love and it is like looking into the face of God. It is holy ground.

The thin veil between heaven and earth at birth feels amazingly like the thin veil that greets us in death. It is a quiet and holy time when family members gather around a loved one to say good-bye, whether death has come after a long illness or suddenly. There is incredible silence and stillness in the room that feels like holy ground where God stands with us in our grief.

Another unexpected thin place where we may see God comes through the difficult practice of reconciliation in our families and work relationships. Walls and tension that build up between life partners, co-workers and family members become blocks to our own mental and spiritual health. Often these tensions are irreconcilable and continue to

cause pain throughout life. There is nothing easy about conflict and just when one seems to settle, another arises to keep us in constant prayerful vigilance and humility.

Mennonite mediator John Paul Lederach calls reconciliation work: conflict transformation because of conflict's power to change us, transform and transfigure us into new people. The key players in any conflict are Justice, Mercy, Truth and Peace who will come and show in skit form their struggle...

In Genesis 33, Jacob met his brother Esau in reconciliation after years of separation and death threats, he said to Esau, "seeing your face is like seeing the face of God." If we are able to let go of some of the anger and wounds which grips us and free ourselves through forgiveness and release - whether or not the other party even asks us for forgiveness and release - we find a key to our mental and spiritual health. This is easier said than done and the discipline of forgiveness and release is something that has to be practiced over and over. Conflict transformation becomes one of the ways we see the face of God in the face of our family members and enemies. It is an amazing and challenging place of transfiguration.

May God be near to us throughout Lent in the thin places; in the beauty of natural settings, in the face of a new grandchild, in the ongoing memories of our loved ones who have died and in our work in difficult relationships. Let us pray: Gracious God, you are present to us in all places and at all times. Thank you for the thin places where we are made especially aware of your tenderness, power and grace. May we continue to be transfigured by your love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.