

Transfiguration Sunday
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
February 11, 2018

We are in the age of VCD and AI—that is, the age of Voice Command Devices and Artificial Intelligence. With a phrase like “Hey, Siri” or “Okay, google” or the name “Alexa,” a personal assistant begins interacting. Sometimes these devices seem God-like. Siri can do math faster than a mathematician, Alexa can play almost any song, and google, well, google knows everything. While we logically recognize that these assistants are not God, we sometimes believe that God acts like the great google. We believe that with the correct phrasing, we’ll get our desired response from God. We might begin to think the Bible is God’s *only* instruction book, or, at its worst, that the Bible *is* God. Yet, even a quick glance at today’s readings will redirect these understandings.

At the beginning of January, we celebrated the feast of Epiphany. Since then, we’ve been focusing on how God reveals Godself to us. In Mark’s gospel, we first saw God’s manifestation during Jesus’ baptism. Yet, in that episode, God’s revelation was fairly covert. You may remember that there was no indication that anyone saw the heavens being torn open and the Holy Spirit descending. We’re not even sure if anyone heard the voice proclaiming that Jesus is God’s beloved. In that first revelation, nothing was public or obvious.

However, today, right in the middle of Mark’s gospel, something public occurred. We heard that Jesus became whiter than freshly fallen snow in the presence of three disciples and the greatest Hebrew prophets. Now, what grabbed my attention was not their location on a mountain, or that

Jesus was dazzling white, or even that two ancient prophets appeared; rather, I'm most intrigued by *what* was revealed.

You see, in many religions, God reveals to humankind an idea, a book, or a belief, for example the Ten Commandments or the Koran. Yet, in this moment God does not give us a set of rules or a statement to obey; rather, God reveals a person in relationship. In that transformational moment, God was revealed in the person of Jesus, witnessed by his closet friends, and confirmed as the continuation of prophetic works. In this episode, one author notes that Jesus will “not reveal the secrets of the universe or the meaning of life; rather, it's himself.”¹

You see, we so often turn to God for the “right” answers. We judge others for not having the “right” belief. We get stuck in the “right and wrong” binaries of life. Yet, in today's reading God is not revealed in anything that is labeled “right,” rather God is revealed in relationship. God comes to us as a vulnerable human—a human who will experience separation and sorrow, hurt and hunger, despair and death. That is why Jesus will not stay on the mountain top. Rather, Jesus will step into the complexity of life because God is often found in the unexpected places.

When I think about it, this Transfiguration story is transformational not only for Jesus but for all for us. After all, we often try to avoid hurt and with that we rob ourselves of vulnerability. We seek ways to transcend humanity instead of embracing humanity as God's gift. We look for the “right” answer instead of valuing relationships as *the* answer. In the end, Transfiguration Sunday reminds us of the centrality of relationship. Is everyone following what I'm saying? Okay, then, take a moment to ponder a place where transformation might occur by prioritizing both relationships and facts instead of only using abstract facts. Use some of the blank space on page 5 of your bulletin if you want to use your motor skills. (Ask for a few to share.)

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2341

One that I've been pondering is the Congress' bill called "Dream Act of 2017," otherwise known as DACA. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services notes that nearly 15,000 DACA recipients have already lost their status. Each day that we sit without Congressional action, another 122 more young immigrants become vulnerable to deportation.² The Presiding Bishop of our denomination, the ELCA, has reminded us that Scripture calls us to welcome to stranger and to love the stranger as ourselves. As a denomination, we have committed to advocating for border policies that respect the human dignity of all people.³ Or, in other words, to look at our border policies with both facts *and* relationships in mind. So too, as a congregation, we continue to live out this Transfiguration value by remembering that immigrants and refugees are more than statistics, rather these are families and individuals loved by a God who completely gave Godself to us in the form of a human. So today, as we live into our Immigrant Welcoming Congregation status and we respond to the call of immigrants and refugees who have urged us to use our voice to enact change, we have provided a few ways for you to lovingly respond to the needs of our neighbor valuing both facts and relationships.

The presence of God is not only found in our advocacy, but we also experience it in this place. Here, we saw God's presence as we gathered around the font with family, friends, and the faithful at Zoey's baptism. Here, as we sit, stand, sing, and share in both silence and God's holy meal we come to recognize that life is hard and that in relationship we share God's sustenance for

² <https://secure2.convio.net/lirs/site/Advocacy?alertId=275&pg=makeACall#.WmZli6inGUI>

³ [http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7909?utm_source=WPLC+Newsletter&utm_campaign=fb7444a31a-January_2014_enews&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0397354b3d-fb7444a31a-&mc_cid=fb7444a31a&mc_eid=\[UNIQID\]](http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7909?utm_source=WPLC+Newsletter&utm_campaign=fb7444a31a-January_2014_enews&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0397354b3d-fb7444a31a-&mc_cid=fb7444a31a&mc_eid=[UNIQID])

the journey. We come here with open minds to explore a God who doesn't require "right" belief but rather urges us to live in relationships of love.

So, on this Transfiguration Sunday, we have heard more than a nice story. Rather, God continues to reveal more than the basic facts that Alexa or Google can give. Rather, God's wisdom has revealed that through loving relationships we receive abundant life. Amen.