

This week is all about “Transfiguration.” We hear about Moses and Jesus with their followers all on a mountaintop, Moses, Elijah, as ascended beings, up there with Jesus, Peter, James and John, radiant and shining! Yes in the Christian year, we think about Jesus in all his “glory,” just before we start that 40 day journey of Lent leading up to Holy Week and Easter. Jesus is transfigured before Peter and John and James, so that he began to shine, even his clothing! We also reflect on the *Exodus* story of Moses, who when he was with God on a mountaintop also became radiant and his face shone, so much that he would put a veil over his face in order not to frighten his followers when he came down from the mountain!

As always, we ask, can we find any relevance of these stories to our own lives? Doesn't seem like it's very relevant, especially in these horrible days of a war that has begun. Most of us are consumed with the tragedy of Ukraine and Russia in the news. We want to do something to stop it. Short of sending our own soldiers to the front lines, we can of course contact our legislators to be sure they support severe economic sanctions. And we can always PRAY harder and more often. There are many prayer vigils. There was a worldwide prayer time last week that did not stop an invasion, but we can surely keep up the spirit of prayer to put brakes on Putin's war. There is a vigil at 11:45 today at the Unitarian-Universalist church downtown... Our UCC area minister just passed along a quote by Madeline L'Engle, that “prayer” is not a form of magic, but it is surely an act of love, and we know that the spirit of love can indeed spread from person to person and thus nation to nation. So I'm still hopeful and prayerful about the solidarity we see in Europe, with enough people “on the same page”... to call out Mr. Putin with truth of how *evil* he is being.

I was just listening to a song from a podcast of one of our Roots members that has the following lyrics: “Turn off the News ... and build a garden with me!” Yes, there is in all of us the need for “retreat” time, the need to take a break from all the problems and suffering in of the world. Whether we are building a garden or going for a long walk along the beach or in forest trails, we need the time of communing with God, with our maker, with the Great Spirit! Jesus set this example for us; the reading says that “Jesus *took with him* Peter James and John (probably to teach them) and went up the mountain *to pray*. It shows great intentionality. And we remember that Jesus often went apart early in the mornings to a quiet place for a time of prayer.

Going apart for prayer can seem useless. Our first hymn talks about the God who is “invisible,” whose light is “inaccessible and hid from our eyes!” Why would we spend time trying to commune with such a mystery, with some presence that is clearly elusive, some being that we may only get glimpses of! Well, I say it is because we see examples of “Beacons” of Light, like Moses and Elijah, and Jesus and Peter and James and John. Not only people in our holy scriptures, but I think each of us, if we ponder long enough, can say we see some amazing Light (radiance) in people we have known in our lifetime. We have known people who are “radiant in spirit!” ... Who show forth goodness, kindness, even calmness, most of the time! Take a moment...(I’ve several in mind).

They are not perfect, of course! And I have often said, I think even Jesus had some “bad days...” doing some things he may have regretted doing. That was even said of God in Israelite history, that God repented, or relented from the destruction God had planned. And Moses and Jesus both had “fading” glory. They did not or perhaps could not maintain radiance of a brilliant shining

24/7! We would all run away afraid. Peter James and John were said to be “terrified” by what was happening on top of that mountain; We hear that Jesus was seen as pure light, so bright that even his clothing shone. He was “transfigured.” But like Moses, he did not remain that way continually.

This gives hope to each of us... as the apostle Paul famously said, we can be changed from one “degree of glory” to another, and we know that Paul started out as a persecutor of Christians. So there is hope for everyone. We all have seeds of radiant light inside of us. We all have seeds of goodness and mercy, patience and kindness, seeds that sometimes flourish more than at other times.

One interesting insight about this mountain top experience with Jesus, is that Jesus was showing his disciples his true self, his more “authentic” self. Far away from the crowds and needy people, Jesus had a closer communion with God his heavenly parent, and the risen souls of Moses and Elijah joined him. Jesus had a few moments of being pure light. Perhaps the word “transfiguration” has more to do with the disciples and ourselves... we are the ones “changed” by seeing the amazing reality of who Jesus is. We know that those early disciples were greatly changed. Peter, James and John all became incredible spokesmen for Jesus and his Way. They led communities of other followers. Similarly, anyone today who spends time with Jesus (in prayer, or contemplating his stories) usually undergoes a time of transformation, a time of transfiguration. There may be a sudden change or “conversion,” but almost always there is continual change over years, a continual maturing in the spirit.

I’m sure I repeat myself, but it bears repeating, that “practices” of spirituality are crucial to continued spiritual growth.

We know there are many and diverse ways to “practice” getting in touch with God, mind, body and spirit, so I won’t try to enumerate them all right now, though it can be fun... to stop and ask for input... anyone brave and vocal want to call out a “practice” that helps you get in touch with the spirit? Just ponder a moment what are *your* ways that you best sense God’s light, God’s peace, God’s love and joy... (naps, walks, reading bible, reading commentaries on bible, meditation, group discussion, group prayer,....music listening, music making)

Can we commit to more time pursuing such ways... in mind, body, and spirit. We all can be changed (or transfigured, or transformed) from one degree of glory to another, from one level of radiance to another! We know we are all praying for more peace in this world, and want to spread it, but we know that it usually happens one person at a time; we need our own mountain top experiences, then ones shared with a few close friends, or perhaps with a worshiping community. Radiance in love and kindness *can* spread steadily, *can* be contagious, through groups and even nation to nation. We got to believe this; seeds of light can spread, just as seeds of darkness and fear can spread.

The disciples hear a voice in the cloud saying, “this is my Son, listen to him...” meaning also “follow him.” The most basic lesson to take away from this mountaintop experience I think is that Jesus *intentionally* went apart, up a mountain, in order to PRAY. So we will do well to be diligent about prayer, to let Jesus shine *through us.*” Amen.