

Responding to the Vision: A Sermon on Mark 9:2-9
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A couple years ago, I went snowshoeing with a friend at Mount Rainier. I was so excited--I had been to Rainier in the summer to see the wildflowers, and had admired it from Kerry Park and other vantage points in Seattle, growing accustomed to wondering "if the mountain was out" on any given day. But to see this powerful mountain in the winter seemed like I was headed for a winter wonderland, just like a postcard, and I imagined seeing for miles and miles and miles. As my friend and I crept closer and closer to Rainier on that late December day, praying we wouldn't have to put the chains on the Prius, we noticed that the top of the mountain was shrouded in cloud. "Maybe it'll get clearer as we go farther up," we said to each other as we climbed higher and higher and higher.

Well, when we arrived at the parking lot at Paradise on the southern side of Mount Rainier, we realized that we couldn't see a thing. We were in the cloud. We could barely see the visitor's center from the parking lot.

I can't lie, I was a bit disappointed. Yes it was a winter wonderland up there, but everything was in shades of grey and there was no trace of the beautiful blue sky that I'd seen on winter postcards from Paradise. I thought that I'd gain some perspective at the top of the mountain, be able to see Washington and maybe even all the way to Oregon if I was lucky. I was hoping to see clearly. Instead, we were surrounded by a cloud, mysterious apparitions making their way out of the fog whenever we approached other snowshoers.

Every Transfiguration Sunday, I wonder what the disciples thought they were in for, when Jesus said, "let's take a hike." I wonder if Peter and James and John questioned Jesus along their trek up the high mountain. I wonder if they were silent on the hike, or if they talked about the

weather, thinking to themselves that they'd gain some understanding when they reached the summit. I think they trusted Jesus to lead them to a place of understanding because they loved him.

But upon reaching their destination, when perhaps the disciples thought they'd understand more about Jesus and who he is and what he's doing in the world, they were clouded by mystery and a weird vision. Jesus appeared to be clothed in light, a dazzling sight, and appearing alongside him none other than the greatest prophets in the Hebrew tradition.

Unlike Jesus' baptism when God's voice is heard telling Jesus, "*You* my beloved son," the voice heard on the top of the mountain directs the declaration of Jesus' identity to the disciples, "*this* is my beloved son, listen to him." With these words, God addresses the disciples, God addresses the church. And so I wonder how we, the church today, are receiving how the Holy is pointing us towards the words and actions of Jesus. How are we doing with listening to the call of the Sacred?

Homiletical scholar Melinda Quivik says in a commentary on this passage, "We might use the words "transfigure" and "transform" interchangeably, but there is a helpful distinction to keep in mind. To be transfigured is to be changed in outward form or appearance. Jesus' transfiguration does not alter who he is but gives to those who see the changed visage a new understanding of him because they see him outwardly in a different light. When we speak of transformation we tend to mean a complete or essential change in composition or structure. Jesus on the mountain with Moses and Elijah is not transformed (changed inwardly) but transfigured before his disciples (shown to be other than assumed). He is not made to have a new essential self but an appearance that conveys his standing in the company of...prophets."¹

1

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/transfiguration-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-mark-92-9-5>

So there's the vision, a new experience of Jesus, a sparkling fresh view of the itinerant teacher...and the disciples have to figure out what to do. That's how it goes, right? When we are confronted with God's grace or made again aware of the Holy's presence among us, *it's on us* to respond.

Enter Peter. Ohhhhhhh Peter, one of my favorite disciples. I love preaching about him, because Peter is all of us. Peter is every moment we've had a question (wise or silly), every time we don't think something through all the way, every moment when we feel the tang of regret after we take action thoughtlessly. Peter is delightfully, terribly human. Gosh, I adore this guy. I am someone who, like Tim said a few weeks ago, takes a little time to think of the perfect thing to say or takes several moments to figure out how I need to respond to a situation. But not Peter, ohhhhhh no, he jumps into action. He hears God's voice and sees Moses and Elijah next to his teacher Jesus, and he responds immediately...he responds by offering hospitality.

And isn't that what love does? Move us to gain a new perspective? Prompt us to make space?

Maybe Peter wasn't so off the mark as we often talk about. Yes, it is a little silly to offer to erect a dwelling place for divine apparitions that have no need of physical shelter. But if you are going to leap into action, if you are going to act from a place of love, erring on the side of hospitality, of creating space, is not a bad way to go. Peter received God's call. And Peter responded.

The vision on the mountaintop might not have been what the disciples had expected. They might have had a thousand questions at the sight of Jesus enrobed in dazzling light, recalling numerous texts from the Hebrew Bible about the glory of God being too great to see directly. They might have knelt in awe as they witnessed their friend, their teacher, their leader take his place among the prophetic messengers from God, drawing on a long line of preaching on the side of justice. I wonder if Peter and James and John were so moved as they observed the vision, as the voice of the Sacred surrounded the summit and told them with a voice beyond

time that they should listen to Jesus. I wonder if all of Jesus' preaching and teaching about love through healing and including and gathering took on new meaning that day.

Of course, the time came when the vision abated, when Jesus no longer was too stunning to look at face to face, when Peter, James and John had to turn around and accompany Jesus back down from the high place. We know, we have heard many times probably, that *we don't get to stay at the top of the mountain. We have to respond* to the mountaintop experience sometime, we have to return to the world, and we have to respond to the revelation of Jesus. We listen, we receive, then we respond.

And how better to respond than following the example of Peter, yes, Peter, who took action from a place of love.

Over the last year, we have had to make choices on how to respond to situations that were out of our control, situations many of us had never imagined. And I have seen, and I wonder if you have seen, people responding with an abundance of love.

Since March 2020, we have limited our contact with people outside our home and supporting front-line workers...all of this is because of love. Love of neighbor moved us to listen to guidance from scientists, to wear masks and distance and use extra hand sanitizer.

Love of community moved us to learn new skills and experiment with new technologies and send handwritten cards and letters and pick up the phone for a good ole telephone call to keep in contact. Love of this church has prompted a long-range planning process and the establishment of task forces that seek to strengthen our congregation's commitment to justice and accompaniment within our walls and with our neighbors.

Love expressed through generosity moved us to continue giving financially as we were able, to our church and to community organizations, redistributing stimulus checks if possible, leading

to our church contributing to feed, clothe, heal and house people throughout this pandemic. In the last year SFBC has continued to support Companis, which works with over 40 nonprofits in the Seattle area doing work in the areas of medical care, food insecurity, housing justice, and addiction recovery. The Outreach commission has led the church in supporting youth tutoring, elder care, climate justice, people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity, and our indigenous neighbors. And of course there's the love that church members have shown each other, feeding each other and driving each other to doctor's appointments and offering childcare and more.

Love expressed through grief has touched each of us as we continue to mourn those among our community who will not be joining us whenever we do gather back in person: Imogene, Constance, Neal and many others...but love for these dear ones also moves us to rededicate ourselves to the causes to which they gave their time and energy and passion.

We've also seen love expressed through outrage, through mourning, through showing up physically and virtually to support Black Lives Matter Seattle King County and King County Equity Now's demands. People in this church have attended rallies and protests, bought supplies for protest medics, donated to bail funds, read books and watched films to educate themselves, advocated for police accountability with city council members and state representatives, had hard conversations with loved ones, had hard conversations within our church family...all guided by love for those among us who are BIPOC, and love for neighbors and family and friends who suffer at the hands of police violence.

As we worship together on this Valentine's Sunday, we recognize that these experiences of love can't be summed up in a heart-shaped card or a bouquet of flowers or a box of chocolates. These ways we seek out to love each other well cannot be contained by time and place. In a commentary on this Scripture, Rodney J. Hunter reminds us that "Christians are...not called to exhibit a passive love that simply tries to be good and avoid evil. Nor is the way of the cross a private bearing of personal woes for the sake of Jesus. It is rather a vigorous, assertive pursuit

of social and personal righteousness through a love that refuses to play the world's power game of domination, exploitation, greed and deception."²

When reaching the mountaintop and wishing for clearer skies and the eyes to see and the mind to understand a world that fundamentally doesn't make sense...we, like Peter, can respond with hospitality driven by love. Though we don't know exactly what we're doing, we know the way we are called to behave. Love is like the top of the mountain: blurred between human and divine and earthly and mundane and embodied.

How, then, do we respond? Let's put up a tent, let's create a space of hospitality.

And now, let us respond with the assurance we hear in the following hymn, the Storm is Passing Over. The composer Charles Tindley was born in 1851, the son of an enslaved man and a free woman. He is known as "the prince of preachers" and one of the founding fathers of gospel music. Ordained in the Methodist Episcopal church, Tindley's career underwent a transfiguration of its own, as he became pastor of a church in which he used to be the janitor, and which is now one of the historic Methodist churches in Philadelphia, called Tindley Temple. As you listen and sing along to the words and music penned by this courageous preacher, ponder on this: Tindley wrote that the journey must continue, through the storm, through the nighttime, through the crashing waves...take courage, friends, because though the journey from the mountaintop is long and we are reminded that we must respond and respond and respond to God's call to love as Jesus loves, the storm indeed is passing over.

May it be so.

² Feasting on the Word, Transfiguration Sunday Year B.

Music Notes
By Ben Luedcke

===Lady Viola Kinney

The prelude, "Mother's Sacrifice" is the only surviving composition of Lady Viola Kinney. Born in Missouri in 1890, her father was a cook and her mother worked in the shops of the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Kinney studied music at Western University, a historically black college in Quindaro, Kansas. After she completed her college education, in 1911 she began a 35-year career as a teacher of music and English at the segregated secondary school, Lincoln High School. She became head of the school's music department and also gave piano recitals in Sedalia and surrounding towns.

When asked why should the music composed by Western University students be purchased, Viola Kinney, then a student at the university wrote:

1. Students should purchase it because it is a product of our Alma Mater by our fellow students.
2. White people should purchase it because they ought to see what the colored youth is doing, and has done during the few years of liberty of mind as well as body.
3. Negroes should purchase because the composers are of their own race, and their children should have such encouragement.
4. Because they have been prize-winners of every Inter-state Literary Session in which they have entered.
5. Because it shows the Negro in his great Musical Metamorphosis from the rag-time to the nobler, higher tones.

=== Rollo Dilworth

Rollo Dilworth has music degrees from Case Western and University of Missouri-St. Louis, and a doctorate in choral conducting from Northwestern University. More than 150 of Dilworth's choral compositions and arrangements have been published. He has authored 3 books of choral warm up exercises intended for elementary and secondary choral ensembles. A frequent presenter at local, state, regional and national conferences, Dilworth has conducted 43 all-state choirs and 6 regional honor choirs and 4 national honor choirs. He has most recently appeared as guest conductor for international choral festivals and master classes in Australia, Canada, Taiwan, Ireland, and China. He is a sought after clinician and advocate for "appropriate appropriation" where care and concern is given to recognize the original creators, and whenever possible to learn directly from the culture bearers.

==Charles Tindley

Dr. Charles Albert Tindley, born 1851, was often referred to as "The Prince of Preachers", he educated himself, became a minister and founded one of the largest Methodist congregations serving the African-American community on the East Coast of the United States.

Tindley's father was a slave, but his mother was free. Tindley himself was thus considered to be free, but even so he grew up among slaves. Never able to go to school, Tindley learned independently and by asking people to tutor him. Without any degree, Tindley qualified for ordination in the Methodist Episcopal Church by examination, with high-ranking scores.

Tindley was a noted songwriter and composer of gospel hymns and is recognized as one of the founding fathers of American gospel music. Five of his hymns appear in the 1989 United Methodist Hymnal. His composition "I'll Overcome Someday" is credited to be the basis for "We Shall Overcome." Later this month we will also sing another gospel song by Tindley, "We'll Understand it Better By and By."

===Russell Oswald

Russell Oswald, distinguished international pianist, was born in Jamaica in 1933. His musical path began with piano improvisation at age three. His mother sent him to music teacher **Ena Helps** with whom he studied piano and harmony. He attended high school at St. George's College concurrently, successfully completing British overseas examinations in academics and music administered by the University of Cambridge.

Jamaican Dances, composed in 1970, consists of three short vignettes for piano. These dances embody the direct simplicity of indigenous folk-song melodies clothed in the sophistication and craftsmanship. Paul Shaw writes, "From a cultural and sociological perspective, the work leads the way in resolving the dilemma of the Caribbean voice "educated" to speak with a European accent – a dance that every Jamaican must master."

These pieces are the musical equivalent of Anancy stories. (Anancy, or Anansi, is a central character in West African and Caribbean folklore originating with the Ashanti people of Ghana, the "trickster" archetypal character.)