

Last Epiphany Year C 2016

Exodus 34:29-35

2 Peter 1:13-25

Luke 9:28-36

One summer morning,  
A long time ago now,  
I was sitting in bright sunshine  
Looking into a cloud.

We had been fogbound  
In a little wilderness harbor,  
And now, on the third day,  
There was blue sky overhead,  
Blue water all around us,  
Unlimited visibility in the open water we could not reach,  
And a dense, dark grey,  
Impenetrable cloud  
Still lying over the very narrow channel  
Through which we would need to pass  
To be on our way.  
Low-lying fog,  
Resting on the water,  
And rising up only about fifteen or twenty feet.

Which meant that we could clearly see  
The masts of the boats passing through the channel,  
Picking their way from point to point  
On compass courses –  
This was before the days of GPS.

We could hear them tooting their horns frantically at each other,  
And more often than not,  
see the tops of the masts swerving dramatically  
as boats appeared on each others' radar  
or materialized out of the gloom.

They could see nothing;  
We could see them shambling about  
But could do nothing to help them.

It was a comical little dance,  
As long as nothing went wrong.

As I watched,

I thought,  
I will never forget this sight,  
This experience.  
And I have no idea right now what it means.

I'm still not sure I can make meaning of what I saw,  
But as I hear the words of today's gospel,  
I think of the boats moving blindly through York Narrows,  
Terrified as they entered the cloud.

And, too, I remember the moment  
When the fog lifted,  
And the boats could see,  
And a few of them were startled by what they saw,  
And then it was an ordinary beautiful day,  
And time to up anchor and be on our way.

All of us have been in a fog  
At least some of the time.

And most of us, surely,  
Have driven or skied or walked or sailed  
Out of the bright sunshine  
Into dense fog.  
We know what it's like to see,  
And then not see,  
And then see again.

And like the disciples in today's gospel,  
We know that it can be scary,  
Terrifying even,  
To enter the cloud.

And all of us, squinting in a blaze of light,  
have blinked  
And scratched our heads  
And failed to understand what we see,  
At least some of the time.

Like the disciples,  
We know what it's like to see with our eyes  
While our minds remain dark.

And like the disciples,  
We know that sometimes the veil parts for a moment,  
And we see clearly.

It happens all around us,  
All the time.  
The glory of God shines out,  
And drifts away,  
And we miss it,  
Or we don't.

Because, by grace,  
Sometimes, just like the disciples  
On the mountaintop,  
We see it.

Thomas Merton saw it,  
In the moment of clarity  
That changed his life  
And opened up a whole new world  
For him and all whose lives he touched.

On March 18, 1958, he writes,

"In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud... I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

We are shining like the sun,  
All of us.

At the corner of Fourth and Walnut  
There is a plaque  
Commemorating the revelation  
That Thomas Merton received.  
It might be a booth,  
Erected by a stammering disciple.  
Or, it might be a sign,  
A tangible witness  
Here and now  
To the truth that is always shining –  
This truth –  
There is a radiant heart of life

That keeps the world turning and the sun coming up,  
That gives us breath  
And makes love again and again,  
New and renewed,  
Against all reason,  
No matter what,  
always and everywhere.

I regret that the times I have been in Louisville  
I have never been to that corner.

And yet, what would I see there  
That I cannot see anywhere,  
Including right outside this door?

Our corner too,  
Is shining like the sun.  
Not only this corner,  
But each of us,  
And everyone around us.  
Not only living creatures,  
But the whole created order.  
Not only God's creation,  
But the works of our hands.

Look around you,  
When you go out the front door.  
See what can be seen  
When time stands still and the veil parts.

Can you see people and activities  
Where now there is only pavement and empty spaces?

Can you see a safe and decent place  
For the people who sleep behind our bushes?

Can you see God  
Shining in the face of friend and stranger?

I believe that is why we are here –  
To see the radiance,  
And to be seen, shining like the sun.

This church was founded on this very spot  
For a reason –  
To bring light and hope to a grimy and confusing corner.

This is the center of something real and bright and good.

We can be agents of transformation,  
Signs of transfiguration.  
As we see the wholeness and hope all around,  
the garden blooming  
On the weedy strip,  
the sound of children,  
hope for the hopeless  
and home for the homeless.  
As we see these things,  
we become God's hands and heart  
to bring them to reality.

The kingdom of God is happening here.  
The light is shining here.

We can't always see it –  
But God can.

God has a dream for us.

It's a dream in which we live into our calling,  
To be a place of acceptance and welcome,  
To be a people of vision and hope,  
To be a green oasis in a changing neighborhood,  
To be the center where many roads cross,  
To be the place where children laugh  
And teenagers talk  
And the old find willing listeners.

Our calling is to be a people  
Who see change and enact it,  
Who see respect the dignity of every human being  
And work to make it real.

Our calling is to be a people  
Who can follow Jesus up the mountain  
And then back down  
And on into the world.

So here's an invitation,  
Perhaps even a challenge:

Look for the light

Shining through every person  
And every thing you encounter this day.

Or better yet,  
Pray for the grace to be given sight  
And understanding.

Whichever team you're rooting for this evening,  
See the light shining also on the other side.

More challenging:  
See the light shining  
Through the face of your least favorite presidential candidate.  
And your second least favorite.  
And the candidate you're prepared to settle for.

Perhaps even more challenging:  
Is there someone in your family,  
In your workplace,  
Here in this church,  
With whom you are in conflict,  
Perpetual misunderstanding,  
Habitual disregard?  
See the light shining through that person,  
Hear the voice of God  
Calling you to listen.

We're all in a fog some of the time.  
We stumble about,  
In danger of running into each other,  
Unaware, as we pick our way through the fog,  
That right over our heads,  
Almost within reach,  
There is bright blue sky.

Those boats I could see so long ago,  
poking their way through the fog,  
May have been a messy sight,  
They may have been comical,  
They may have been in danger,  
They were probably at least a little scared.  
But they knew something worth remembering:  
There was a path,  
Even if they couldn't see it.

There was a trustworthy way through the fog,

And if they could stay on it,  
They would win through.

Our way is messy sometimes,  
And perhaps even a bit comical.  
There are hazards.  
We can't always see clearly.

But we have a guide,  
Who is certain and sure.  
The one through whom the light shines  
Will lead us where we need to go.

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· *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*