

## Transfiguration 2017

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Peter 1:13-21

Luke 9:28-36

The brighter the light,  
The sharper the shadow.

What kind of shadow  
Does the transfiguration cast?

When the friends of Jesus  
Followed him up the mountain,  
And remained with him while he prayed,  
They found themselves face to face  
With a truth that was bigger than they had known,  
A light that was brighter  
Than they could have imagined.

That light revealed the truth by which we live.  
This truth: the divine source of life  
Chose,  
In the deepest of mysteries,  
To bind the eternal to our fleeting life,  
To weave the infinite into our raveled ends,  
To pour boundless compassion  
Into our endless need for love.

Those three friends on the mountaintop  
Saw what we always hope to believe,  
What we learn to trust,  
That the holy one who inhabits all things  
Really wants to live with us.

Light was the sign of this indwelling truth.  
It flamed out,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
Brighter than the sun,  
And showed them what they only dimly suspected,  
That in Jesus, all the fullness of God  
Was present, and active,  
Seeable, touchable,  
Friendly and knowable.  
Infinitely mysterious

And wonderfully intimate.

In the fleeting moment  
We call the transfiguration,  
A moment gone just as they became aware  
That it was really real,  
They understood  
what they would never have figured out on their own:  
Jesus is one with the holy one.  
In him the holy one is fully present,  
Through him the holy one comes among us.  
By him,  
If we dare,  
We discover what the holy one intends for us.

Because Jesus came  
Not so much to inspire us to worship,  
As to invite us, like him,  
To become holy.

Pious? Not really.  
Good? Fortunately not.  
Proper? By no means.  
Holy.

Alive to the infinite.  
Makers of life.  
Tenders of love.  
Seekers of truth.

What makes Jesus special  
Is not so much that light shines through him,  
As that he can hold the light,  
And remain himself.

We can see the light,  
Long for the light,  
Embrace the light,  
And then, we have to turn away.  
Jesus remains in the light.  
We're the ones who can't see it anymore,  
In him or in ourselves.

It's hard to see the light in us,  
All the time.

We can't hold all that light.  
We disappear, and leave a shadow.

By a bitter irony  
That will remain for the rest of time,  
This day – August 6 – on which we mark the transfiguration,  
The shining forth  
Of the light that made the world,  
Creating light flowing through a human being,  
Making clear the glory of life,  
On this same day,  
We let loose a light brighter than the sun,  
The destructive fire  
Of the atomic bomb.  
A light too bright for us to comprehend.

That light showed us,  
Not who God is,  
But who we are.  
We are the makers of the light  
That brings death.

The brighter the light,  
The sharper the shadow.

The light and heat of the bomb were so intense  
That as they evaporated living things,  
Children, women, men, cats, leaves,  
They etched shadows in the stone and concrete that remained,  
Shadows that still survive,  
Memorials to those snatched away  
By a light that was too bright.

Those shadows follow us through the years,  
Reminding us of what we have done,  
What we have not said  
We would not do again.

Those shadows will not fade until the world is changed.

Shadows are part of our life.  
We live between earth and heaven,  
Envisioning the infinite  
And engulfed in the shadows.

Our shadows follow us from the past

And stretch into the future.  
We cannot get away from them.  
But, dragging our shadows behind us,  
If, like the friends of Jesus,  
We can stay awake,  
Then we can see the life-giving light,  
Shining brighter than the sun,  
Showing us the holy one is coming among us.

Where do you see the light shining?  
What is your transfiguration moment?  
What makes you know,  
That even if the shadows of what we have done  
Can never be undone,  
The holy light will still shine,  
Not only for us,  
But through us.

Where so you see the light shining?

I see it shining here.  
Among us,  
Shadows and all.

Here,  
Where the holy comes among us week by week,  
Yes, in the beauty of light,  
In story and song and prayer,  
In service and the works of justice  
And –  
in bread and wine,  
Transfigured before us,  
Becoming what we trust is true.  
In the bread and wine,  
As on the mountaintop,  
The holy one comes among us  
And enters our human life,  
Our human selves,  
Shadows and all.

Long ago,  
In another dark time,  
With the barbarians pounding down the gates,  
A wise and faithful and deeply flawed,  
Maybe fatally flawed man of God  
Wrote to the faithful

In words that have become for us  
The invitation to receive  
The gifts of God.

Behold who you are,  
Become what you receive. \*

Behold who you are.  
You are the body of Christ.

Become what you receive,  
The body of Christ.

Behold who you are.  
Yes, we are the body of Christ.  
And yes,  
We are the bringers of destructive light,  
A light brighter than the sun,  
That snatches life away.  
We dropped the bomb.  
The shadows will never go away.

We are the ones who chose as our leader  
Someone entirely unqualified and unsuitable.  
We face a new nuclear threat,  
we drive by and step over homeless men and women  
Every single day,  
We watch the disintegration of our land and sea  
And the extinction of much that we hold precious.  
We are the ones who want to do right,  
And don't know how.

And yet,  
We, sorry and sad as we are,  
We are the body of Christ,  
And we receive that truth  
Into our bodies  
Every time we gather here.

We become what we receive.

We become the truth that the transfiguration  
Figures forth, foreshadows, contains.

The holy, the divine, the beyond, the more,  
Is here.

Present. For us. For the world.

When the feeble friends of Jesus  
Figured this out on the mountaintop,  
They knew they needed to do something.

So they babbled about booths – dwellings.  
It's not as silly as it seems.  
They are trying,  
Using the language and custom of their time,  
To say and show  
That God is among them.  
A booth – a dwelling –  
is a symbol of the presence of God.  
Just like the bread and wine.

A symbol, and more than a symbol.  
More than a sign.  
A home.

The friends see that God has come among them,  
And they want to make it real,  
Hold it fast,  
Grasp it.

As do we.

We want to give the holy a home.

But, as the feeble friends learned,  
You can't hold on to light.  
Any more than you can banish shadows.

So here we are,  
On this day that is so bright and dark,  
In a time that is so troubled  
And still has room for hope.

What will we do?

I wonder if we are called  
To mark the transfiguration  
Only in this way:  
By trusting that it is true.

It is true

That in Jesus of Nazareth,  
All the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.  
It is true that just for a moment,  
His friends, who were as frail and fallible as we are,  
Saw that truth in the light that surrounded him  
and flowed through him.

It is true that the radiance of the holy one  
Could shine through each of us.

So maybe on this day,  
As we go forth,  
We look for the light.  
We see the shadows,  
And we look for the light.

Look for the light,  
In the bread and wine,  
In the gathered community,  
In yourself,  
In the world.  
The story we hear today  
Tells us there is always light.  
Sometimes we see it.

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· Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 272, On the Eucharist