

Last Tuesday at our noon Bible Study, when we were talking about this gospel reading, Elaine Harrison mentioned that the “dazzling white” description of Jesus’ clothing stuck out as we read today’s passage. These words made her think of the multiple Tide Ad commercials shown during the Super Bowl last Sunday. The ads were quite funny as each showed brilliant white clothing which supposedly had been washed in Tide. While this was very humorous, and we had a good laugh because of it, I think there is a connection to what is really happening in this passage. You see, the gospel writer is telling a story that says something about the dazzling light of God’s presence shining through to us and around us as we daily live our lives. It is a light we often do not see as we go about the ordinariness of daily life.

When we look at all that is happening in the world around us, I have a feeling many of us tend to ask, “Where is God in all of this?” We live in a culture in which we think God is out there somewhere. Maybe way up there, far removed from our everyday experience. In fact, religion often teaches that we should **seek out** the presence of God. However, the reality is that we cannot seek out God’s presence, we cannot earn God’s

presence to us, we cannot prove ourselves worthy of God's presence, nor can we do anything to prohibit God's presence to us. The deepest truth given to us in today's story is that we are totally and completely enveloped in the presence of God.

As we look at today's gospel reading, whatever happened on top of that unnamed mountain remains a mystery. There simply is no rational or logical explanation for this event that was witnessed to by Peter, James, and John. Whatever actually happened, the *transfiguration*, as it came to be known, is an event that was primarily for the disciples' benefit. Counter to what some suppose, this cannot be the revelation of Jesus' divinity; if it were, then it would make Elijah and Moses divine as well. Neither should this be read as a final dispensation of prophetic genius in line with Moses and Elijah as if Jesus is in rank with their company. After all, it is Jesus who is **distinguished** from these historical figures, and it is **he** who is left standing alone when the divine voice enters the scene.

First and foremost, we should understand this is a story and we should let go of our need for facts and allow a deeper truth to speak. In fact, preeminent New Testament scholar N.T. Wright suggests that when we look at this story, "the veil of ordinariness that normally prevents us from

seeing the ‘inside’ of a situation is drawn back, and a fuller reality is disclosed.” The veil is drawn back so we can see a deeper truth.

In verse three something dramatic but not permanent happens to Jesus. His garments “became glistening, intensely white,” indeed so white that even the best experts in bleaching, not even Tide, could obtain such a result. This is the “transfiguration.” The Greek word used for transfiguration is *metamorpho*. It means that Jesus changed in outward appearance or form.

Now this brings up an interesting question: Is the transfiguration a story of metamorphosis where Jesus changes into something he was not before? I don’t think so. Metamorphosis is permanent. But, this experience is really a revelation more than it is a mutation. For the benefit of the disciples, Jesus’ outward appearance transforms, and his inward nature of God’s pure, light-filled presence is revealed. “The veil of ordinariness is drawn back, and a fuller reality is disclosed.” And, because the veil is drawn back, the disciples see something extraordinary for the first time. Jesus is totally and completely enveloped in the presence of God.

Have you ever looked at a magnified picture of a snowflake? If you have, from that point on, there is a sense in which one marvels at the

beauty and uniqueness of every single snowflake. Or, do you remember the first time you looked at a speck of dirt through a microscope? What up until then had seemed a boring little speck of dirt, suddenly becomes something full of pattern, color, and even beauty. What you see through that microscope opens up a whole different world and, from that point forward, you never look at specks of dirt the same way. And, you can begin to realize that, yes, everything now has the potential to be more than it seems. You see, the world we live in has many layers, many dimensions, and sometimes these dimensions, normally hidden, may appear. There is a much deeper reality than the ordinariness we see with the naked eye.

As the disciples see Jesus in today's story the veil is drawn back, and they see a deeper truth, a fuller reality – God is very present **in** this one they call Jesus. And, the disciples discovered they, themselves, were already living in the presence of God. Yes, “The veil of ordinariness has been drawn back, and a fuller reality is disclosed.” The truth is, **we** need moments where the veil of ordinariness is drawn back, and a fuller reality is disclosed. We need the kind of experiences that allow us to discover a deeper truth. We need the kind of experiences that give us pause so that we might be reminded that we, too, **are already living in the presence of God**. So often we ask God to be with us or with other people and we try to

attain God's presence. But, as Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, puts it: "We **cannot** attain the presence of God because we're already totally in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness." Yes, what's absent is our awareness of the light of God's presence to us throughout the ordinariness of our daily lives.

I have shared this story with you before, but it is worth sharing again. When I worked at First Lutheran Church in Muskegon, Michigan, Pastor Bill Uetricht and I would go and lead worship at the local nursing home the first Sunday of each month. I loved those monthly, afternoon services. The residents, whose bodies and minds had been devoured by the effects of aging, often unable to comprehend or communicate much of anything, would come alive in beautiful ways as we experienced worship together. I remember one special dear lady named Savannah. She was a wheel chair bound, 94-year old African American woman whose body and mind suffered greatly, broken from the ravages of old age. I remember Savannah because, at one of those treasured worship experiences, she spontaneously and surprisingly burst into song, gifting us with her vocal rendition of the Lord's Prayer. Now, as a trained musician, I love quality performances and thought I knew what beauty was. However, as this very feeble old woman sang this prayer with her aged, weak, scratchy, shaking

voice, I heard one of the most beautiful offerings I will ever hear. It was a moment of **transcendent** beauty, a sacred moment in time when the light of Jesus became so brilliant and so very present. In that moment, “the veil of ordinariness that normally prevents us from seeing the ‘inside’ of a situation [was] drawn back, and a fuller reality [was] disclosed.” In that moment, I discovered we were enveloped in the presence of God. And, in that moment, I was changed!