

“Beyond the Fear”

As was stated in our Threshold Moment, **“There is a saying, ‘feel the fear and do it anyway.’”** “The disciples, who just a few years earlier were getting up every day and simply praying for a good catch of fish, stand on the top of a mountain and see their leader joined by dead, yet famous, ancestors of the faith. They have already begun to realize that Jesus is something of a legend, but this seals it; and they are terrified. And now perhaps, they can see that this is not your ordinary life they’re mixed up in. They ‘felt the fear’ but continued to follow Jesus.”

Fear – what is fear? It is the experience of an emotion, which comes forth from our minds, spirits, and bodies as our reaction to a perceived danger or threat. And often, it is very helpful because it focuses our attention and efforts on preventing injury and, perhaps, even death! Have you been afraid? Last Thursday evening, after I discovered some telephone line issues had caused the church’s thermostats to be inaccessible to remote control on my cell phone, I got in my car and headed toward the church, so I could physically turn on the heaters in the Fellowship Hall for the Carrollton Music Teachers Association Meeting last Friday. I was going east on Round Grove Road in the left hand lane and had just passed the Valley Parkway intersection driving near the 50 m.p.h. speed limit when out of the driveway of a new retirement center on the right a car quickly entered onto Round Grove Road headed toward the left hand lane a few feet in front of my car. I saw the car coming toward my lane just in front of my car and fear of injury and damage led me to quickly apply the brakes, honk my car’s horn, and steer my car away from hitting the intruding vehicle. Fortunately, fear, skill, and experience enabled me to avoid damage to my car and potential injury or death.

Have you had an experience with fear, which helped you avoid or reduce injury to yourself or someone else? **Fear can sometimes be our friend. However, most of the time when we are tempted to be afraid, our fears lead us to falsely believe something valuable or important to our welfare is endangered.** Unfortunately, such false fear and beliefs imprison many people, so they have some very ugly and even self-destructive ways of thinking, believing, and living. Such as, becoming a bully, a racist, a physical or sexual abuser, a hater of people who are different from one’s self, and a person who seeks to control or oppress others for personal benefit. Now, that type of fear is not good for an individual, the community, nation, or the world! Traditionally, the lifestyle connected to that fear is what is meant when the Scriptures refer to the ways of sin and death.

Anyone remember our Advent Worship Celebration Series, Angels Among Us? I mentioned back in December that I defined, not only angel visitations but any confrontation with God or a representative of God, a Theophany in my Master of Divinity Thesis of many years ago. In my thesis, I pointed out there was a pattern to what happened in a theophany experience. Among the components of that pattern or form was Fear. It is usually manifested in response to some Extraordinary Event, which is immediately identified as a Confrontation with or experience of the Presence of God or the Divine Parent’s Representative. So, it should not surprise us the story of Jesus’ Transfiguration is one of those Theophanies and follows that form. When the disciples – Peter, James, and John experienced the Transfiguration of Jesus – the Glorious Light of God’s Kingdom manifested on and in Jesus, their experience was an awesome one because they realized **God’s Presence and Kingdom was among them!** Mark, in his usual terse and plain fashion, reported this response of fear when he described Peter’s reaction and suggestion that he and the others set up tents to commemorate the occasion. Specifically describing what Peter did, Mark wrote in **verse 6, “He and the others were so frightened that he did not know what to say.”** Part of their fear was because they knew they could be severely injured or put to death because of the Breaking in of God’s Presence and Kingdom. They and their contemporaries knew firsthand how it was very dangerous to be around someone with great power because, frequently, the powerful had arbitrarily inflicted pain among

those they chose to oppress. Since most, if not all of the original disciples, had hoped Jesus would become their earthly King ahead of a great host of an army of angels and men and that they would become rulers beneath their Lord, they had great hope at his Transfiguration, but also, had the fear they might be struck down by God's Glorious Power. Being human beings like us, the original disciples were slow to understand Jesus' purpose and true identity. They were not so much different than a typical person today for the common misunderstanding of Jesus' task is he merely came to save our souls – meaning provide a way to earn life after death. **Fortunately, Jesus did not give in to the selfish desires of his disciples, but, instead, carried out his true Purpose and Identity!**

Rev. Kathryn Matthews focused on the purpose of the Transfiguration of Jesus by pointing out “Rodney Hunter puts it this way: ‘Jesus’ mission was not to make a big deal of himself or to elevate his followers to positions of power, authority, and prestige through identification with him.’” **“It was rather to point through and beyond himself to God and to God’s coming reign on earth, and to invite his followers to find their voice in bearing witness to this transforming, redemptive God.”** Responding to Hunter’s statement, Matthews asked the following questions, “Those are lovely words, but how do they translate for the life of faith in a 21st century, post-modern (or whatever comes after post-modern) world? If those outside the church read this mission statement, how faithful to it do you think they would find us? Would they witness lives transformed, hearts broken open?” (“Called to Resurrection” by Rev. Kathryn Matthews posted on Weekly Seeds)

The Transfiguration of Jesus is about the breaking in of the Kingdom of God into the world – into our lives. It reveals our call to live as people who belong to the Kingdom of God – to our Divine Parent and to God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Put in a more contemporary way, Jesus Christ has revealed to everyone that our true life – eternal life – the most fulfilling life is lived in the New Relationship with God, God’s Son, and one another or as our **“Bread, Bath, and Beyond” Worship Celebration Series infers – we are to live that New Relationship with God and to move beyond the world’s way of selfish living, beyond bondage to our fears, beyond the boundaries imposed upon us, and beyond the horizon – the limitations society seeks to make us and others manifest in our relationships with all the people of this planet.**

It is important for us to remember Jesus provided us the setting for his Transfiguration in the verse just prior to our Lectionary Gospel Reading. **In Mark 9:1, Jesus said, “I tell you, there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power.”** That is exactly what happened when Jesus was Transfigured! Those disciples saw the Kingdom of God come with power! It was not just because Jesus shined or because he was talking with Moses and Elijah. If there was any further doubt in the minds of Peter, James, and John, then what happened in verse 7 surely put that to rest for Mark reported in **verse 7, “Then a cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud, ‘This is My Own Dear Son — listen to him!’”** The Voice of our Divine Parent not only made it clear God’s Presence and Kingdom were with Jesus and the disciples at his Transfiguration but it also comforted – quelled the disciples’ fear! In the Birth, Life, Healings, Teachings, Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, it is clear that God comforts us or quells our fears! Jesus shone at his Transfiguration and continues to be God’s Light for us. **To get the full benefit of God’s Sacrifice in the sending of Jesus into the world, we need to “listen to him” – to follow his teachings and his example of welcoming and loving all people.** It was said in our Threshold Moment, “Are there extraordinary things we can do if we can move beyond the fear?” Let’s move beyond our fears – break down the boundaries of hate and be agents of Jesus’ Light to others. Let’s show the Kingdom of God not only has broken into the world but continues to break through in our lives! **Let us share God’s and Jesus’ Radical and Extravagant Hospitality by inviting everyone to join in the People of God, the New Relationship with God, and the New Agape Loving Life in Jesus Christ! Amen.**