

Over the past few years, I've come to love Celtic Christianity, so I was pleased to discover the cross on the steeple here at Covenant is a Celtic cross. The Presbyterian Church emerged from Scotland, but long before the Protestant Reformation, and long before the Church of England or the Catholic church before that, Celtic Christianity flourished in Scotland. There are many unique facets the Celts gave us, but perhaps none more significant than the insistence that heaven and earth are closer than we think. The Celts say that heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in thin places that distance is even shorter. The more familiar forms of Imperial Christianity be it Catholic or Protestant emphasize God's transcendence and human depravity. Celtic Christianity on the other hand speaks of God's immanence and human radiance. In the story of the Transfiguration, we witness the light of heaven draw near and humanity shining brightly.

Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up the mountain to a thin place, where for a short time heaven and earth are one. Have you ever been to a thin place? I think you have. You may not have seen someone's face light up and have conversations with dead people like Jesus did, but I suspect you've been to places where you could hear the heartbeat of heaven, where for a few moments you knew you were standing on holy ground. Thin places are hard to talk about. How do you put into words something as ineffable as an encounter with the divine? You can't. Not if it's truly divine. You may have noticed that Peter, James, and John were struggling to stay awake, which makes me wonder, how can they be sure they didn't dream it? The whole story reminds me of the end of Harry Potter when Harry has a light-filled vision with Professor Dumbledore, and asks, "Is this all real? Or is it just happening inside my head?" Dumbledore responds, "Of course it's happening inside your head, Harry. Why should that mean that it's not real?" That may frustrate our rational minds that want reality to be measurable, but if we really are dealing with God, then our reasons and measures won't be sufficient. How do you measure the infinite?

Luke tells us the disciples were weighed down with sleep, but even when they wake up, they seem to be only half-awake, their eyes heavy and vision blurry. This seems like an apt description of us, doesn't it? Most days, we are only half-awake, half-aware of God's presence in our lives, and most of the time we are asleep to the radiance that is all around us. What might happen if we came fully awake? In his stupor, Peter both sees and doesn't see. And when he speaks, he doesn't really know what he's talking about. Perhaps that should be a preface attached to every sermon ever given, including this one, every book of theology, every confession and creed, every statement of faith should begin with the phrase, "They didn't really know what to say." When it comes to God and Spirit, to the intersection between heaven and earth, do any of us really know what we are talking about? Perhaps our worship needs more awe and less assertion.

The temptation when we come to the transfiguration is to think that it's a story about Jesus' identity and not our own. The first part is right, but the second isn't. This is a story about Jesus' identity. There is more to him than meets the eye. Just like at his baptism, the Mount of Transfiguration reveals that Jesus is more than mere flesh and blood. The voice from heaven says, "This is my Son, my Chosen one; listen to him," and that's good advice. It may sound basic, but it's true: Jesus is worth listening to. There's something about Jesus that is unique, singular, sacred, and safe. The way Jesus includes the outcasts and challenges

the powerful, without demonizing anyone, if ever there was a person who was God's chosen one, he was it.

The transfiguration is about Jesus' identity, but it's not only about him, is it? Jesus shines with divine light and is revealed as God's chosen one, but he's not the only one shining that day. Moses and Elijah were as well. And for Moses, this wasn't the first time, was it? Moses first received his divine calling from a burning bush in the wilderness. He steps into a thin place and meets with God at the burning bush and is called to bring freedom to God's people. The Rabbis have said that the bush didn't suddenly start burning the day Moses found it, but it was always burning. The difference that day was that Moses noticed it. He noticed the thin place that was always there, right in front of him. He came fully awake to the divine presence in the wilderness that day. Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev takes this a step further and says, the truth is that every bush is burning. The only question is, do we see it? The thin places are all around us if only we wake up and see them.

When we are only half-awake, we think that divine light only shines on a select few—Jesus, Moses, Elijah. Maybe Beyonce. But the rest of us are left in the darkness of our humanity, separate from God and unworthy. We don't see the light in our own faces, and because of that, we can't see it in others either. But in our Exodus reading for today, we see that by the end of his life, it's not only the bush that shines with divine light. Moses' own face does as well, and for a time, the people could see it. They could see in him the radiance of God. And if you look long enough into the face of another person, you can see it there too. In the vulnerable wonder of a newborn, you can see it. They come out smelling of heaven, but it's not just them. We all carry that divine light within. C. S. Lewis said, "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship." Look closely at your neighbor, and you will witness the glory of God.

But what about when you? When you gaze upon your own reflection in the morning, will all your imperfections and wrinkles, do you see divine light shining back at you? Or do you see someone who should be doing more? What we see in ourselves, we see everywhere else too. In fact, we can't imagine about God what we don't feel about ourselves. It's really that simple. Let me say that again, we can't imagine about God what we don't feel about ourselves. If we look at ourselves and see disappointment, ugliness, and shame, we will project that everywhere we look, on other people, and on God. But if we can see the divine light shining through us, if we can dare to look upon our own faces and see who we really are, beautiful, beloved, and holy, we will see the same in everyone else and in everything.

Suddenly, every bush burns, every river pulsates with radiance. Even in the face of the one we might consider an enemy—the hateful racist, the panhandler, the white nationalist, the violent offender, everyone. If you see yourself shining with light, suddenly they will begin to shimmer too. How we feel about ourselves is how we feel about everything and everyone, even God, especially God. If we condemn ourselves, we will worship a condemning God. But if we dare to look upon our own face with affection and mercy, if we dare to stop condemning ourselves and see as God sees, then suddenly, the merciful God we say we believe in will reveal herself to us, and you realize that thin places are not only on mountain tops. They are everywhere we have eyes to see.

The transfiguration reveals Jesus is the chosen one, who is worthy of our love and attention. But Jesus didn't come just to reveal his identity, as if he is the important one and the rest of us lucky to breathe the same air as him. No, he came to reveal that divine light that shines in all creation. He came to reveal that every place is a thin place, if only we wake up and see. Friends, it's time to wake up. It can't come soon enough. The world needs us fully awake. Our children need us fully awake. The planet needs us fully awake to see that every bush is burning and every face shines with divine light. So, let me ask you again, have you ever been to a thin place? Wake up and look around. You're in one right now.