

Changed from the Inside Out by Holly C. W. Aastuen  
Luke 9:28-36 February 14, 2010

When I was young, my family went to church every Sunday even when we were in countries where we didn't speak the language. My memory of those experiences was that the sermons were just as boring as they were in English and the songs were confusing. I do remember one time, however, when we were in a church in Germany when they started singing a song that was very familiar—the tune was Amazing Grace and even though I didn't know the meaning of what they were singing, it brought me comfort to sing in my head along with them.

It gave me a connection in a place where I thought I had none.

I had another one of those moments yesterday at the women's retreat. We were learning about three women of the Bible—Dorcas, Priscilla and Lydia. While we were eating lunch, Lydia came and visited us, dressed in some of her beautiful purple cloth. She welcomed us into her home and talked a bit about her life. She told us that we were eating at the same table that Paul and Silas ate at when they came to her home. And my imagination took me to the first century and what a powerful experience it would have been to meet Paul and Silas. I felt a connection with people in the Bible, a connection I had never experienced before.

The Bible story that Becky just read was about a time when Jesus and his buddies went up the mountain to pray—something Jesus did all the time with or without his friends. He was always going up mountains to pray. This time wasn't any different. Jesus took Peter and James and John up the mountain and then suddenly, nothing was the same. While praying, Jesus changed, his face and clothing glowed. When Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus, the others knew that they were witnessing a miracle of faith and that nothing would ever be the same again. Peter blurted out something about booths that indicated he was overwhelmed by the experience and wanted to put it in definable terms. And then the voice from the clouds confirmed all they had experienced and seen, "This is my Son," said the voice. "Listen to him."

And then all was gone and the men were just as they were before.

Jesus' transfiguration was something they had never seen before. He didn't just change the look on his face, he went through a metamorphosis that changed him from the inside out and changed the way the disciples saw him.

God's light shone through Jesus and his identification with the divine was visually clear at that particular moment.

The transfiguration occurred in the middle of Jesus' ministry—not at the very beginning as if an announcement of who Jesus truly was, not at the end as if to say that Jesus had come from God and was going to God. This transfiguration happened in the middle of everything. It happened after feeding the 5000 and

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before sending out the 70, two by two, to go out into the villages. It happened in the middle of everything as if to say, “Do not be discouraged. God is here.”

It gave them fuel for the journey.

God’s light shines through Jesus not for its own sake, but to encourage those who witnessed it, giving them strength to face the dark days ahead, the dark days that would eventually lead to Jerusalem.

What encourages us? Where do we see this light of the divine, shining from the inside out?

On this Valentine’s Day, I am reminded of that moment that happens in every wedding. Often it’s in the face of the bride or the groom, that look, that glow as they are transfigured before us. They have a luminescence about them, a light from within that is inspired by love, that fills their whole being. And they shine on us all.

There are other times that I’ve seen that light—in the face of someone in deep prayer, sometimes in the face of a child who is full of overwhelming joy. And sometimes when we see that look, that intensity, that joy, or more often, when we experience that intense transformation in our own lives, we need to do something or we feel we’ll burst. We want to make booths like Peter did or shout about it from the mountain tops!

In her book “Traveling Mercies,” writer Anne Lamott talks about a woman named Ranola. Ranola is the backbone of the church. She sings in the choir, teaches Sunday School and is there every time the doors are open. Everybody loves Ranola and Ranola loves everybody. Well, almost everybody.

There’s a man named Ken who attends the same church. Ken has AIDS. Ken is also gay. Ranola, having grown up in the conservative Southern Baptist faith, didn’t know what to do with Ken, so she usually ignored him. Both Ranola and Ken were every Sunday attenders until Ken got so sick he couldn’t make it to church for several weeks. On the Sunday he came back to church, Ranola remained aloof from Ken until the hymn: “His Eye is on the Sparrow.”

As they sang, Ranola looked out from the choir and saw Ken, visibly suffering from his disease, sitting because he didn’t have enough strength to stand, yet he sang with the congregation, “Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows fall?” And as she looked and as they sang, Ranola left the choir loft and went to Ken, reached down and lifted him up and held him as they sang.

Though she didn’t wake up that morning deciding to hug a man who’s lifestyle and disease she didn’t understand, but there she was, standing and holding a man whose body was ravaged by AIDS because her vision was changed. She no

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longer saw just men and women. She saw out in that pew a child of God. And she acted on what she saw.

About 20 years after sitting in a church in Germany, I was in another country that is foreign to me and it's a Sunday. The whole extended family is there—but now we kids have spouses and one or two children each.

We're at a resort in Jamaica and we're unable to easily travel to town to find a church, so we decided that we'd have our own worship in Grandma and Grandpa's room. When we arrive at the hotel room, the cleaning woman is there and we invite her to stay. We pile onto beds and floor and the few chairs that the room has and begin.

First we talk with the woman about who we are and why we're gathered. The woman tells us through her halting, yet soft spoken English that she's a member of a Methodist church in the town, but rarely goes because of her work.

Since we have no hymnals we ask the woman what Christian songs she knows that we could sing together.

We finally decide to sing Amazing Grace, which she knows, but not in English. Even though we encourage her to sing, she demurs and is satisfied to just listen, she says.

I don't know when that changed, but after our 15 minutes or so of devotional reading and prayer, we sang the last song in our homemade worship. And as we sang from memory, I looked over at her and she was singing, softly, but she was singing along with us.

And all together we sang: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."

It was a moment that was holy, that transcended cultural differences and helped us to see the God-light in each other and in that moment.

Jesus was transfigured, revealing the God light that was within, showing to his disciples that he was of the stuff and substance of God.

Let your light shine. Look for evidence of the holy—in our faces and the faces of others in the faces of the ones you meet. Don't miss it when God is breaking through our facades and making us glow—from the inside out.