

St Mark's, Niagara on the Lake
The Last Sunday after Epiphany, year 'A'
19 February 2023
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This morning, I'm reminded of something the American poet Maya Angelou once said: "When someone shows you who he is, believe him." But we don't want to believe it, and we are socially and psychologically conditioned to dis-believe these revelations of self and to rationalize them. We prefer to accept that the persona is the true person and the mask the true face rather than own up to the fearful reality: that none of us is who we say we are and the true person is rather different from the assumed identity we display to the world.

The story of Jesus' transfiguration is one in which we see the effect the revelation of one's true self can have. But there is one crucial difference, of course: the real Jesus who was revealed to the disciples was even more beautiful, desirable, charismatic, holy and pure than the Jesus they knew. And there was that mysterious voice saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved." That is to say, the disciples were convinced in the depths of their being that what they were seeing was true, that the man Jesus was even more wonderful. They were beginning to see his otherness. They were glimpsing the holy God through an ordinary man, who was also the incarnation of something more than humanity.

Curiously, though, Jesus ordered them to tell no one about what they'd seen. It's almost as if he himself couldn't believe it, couldn't believe that he was the beloved Son of God, that he was even more than he appeared to be, that he was the true and perfect man. Perhaps Jesus was disinclined, as we all are, to believe the truth about himself, even if that truth is clearly visible to those closest to us. In Dorothy Sayers' *The Man Who Would Be King* a beggar meets Jesus and says to him, "I never set eyes on your face before. Faces mean nothing to me. But you look the way you ought to look if you're the man I take you for."

But the question for you and me this morning isn't, "Can we see the glory of Christ as the disciples did?" Nor is it even, "Are we willing to tell the world what we have seen?" No: the question for you and me is, "Will the holiness of God and the glory of the truth of Jesus' life be reflected in our own lives?" Yet in order to answer this question, we must go back to what I said at the beginning about the true person.

Theologically speaking, the true person is fallen or sinful. These aren't negative terms, as we so often assume. To say that we're fallen and sinful is to speak a deep truth about human existence and the world, namely that it's less than perfect, that everyone is flawed and broken, and that the gulf between the hope of the world and its troubling reality is immeasurably vast. Life isn't perfect, neither is the world, nor are we. This

is the reality of our present situation, a reality so dire that we attempt to hide our complicity and congress with it—and our captivity to it—behind our various facades.

But this isn't the way God meant things to be. We, and the world, are designed and destined for something more glorious, promising, and free. Our "true" selves are not the peevish selves prone to anger and defensiveness that lurk just beneath the surface of our constructions and pretences. Our true selves are the selves that are yearning to break free from the present limitations of life, selves that keep a divine spark glowing, despite the coldness, hostility, and gloom of life. Our true selves are the selves imbued with the glory of the Christ who sleeps deep within, glory which would transfigure us if only we would open ourselves to the God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

In one of his *Dialogues*, Plato spoke of an allegory in which a charioteer drives a chariot pulled by two winged horses, each fighting to go its own way. One of the horses is compliant and tame, and the other is exactly the opposite: stubborn and wild. The Charioteer represents the human intellect and reason. The first horse represents rational and moral impulses and the second horse represents irrational passions and appetites. Thus the Charioteer must direct the chariot—the self—towards enlightenment, all the while trying to stop the horses from going different ways.

Such are our lives in a fallen world. We are pulled in various directions by many forces that compete against one another, and we find controlling the chariot of our lives so difficult that we never gain enough altitude, enough perspective, to see things clearly. We've forgotten that we're born, in Wordsworth's words, "trailing clouds of glory." We've fallen down, down, down and have neglected to nurture the divine spark within.

But there's another chariot, and it's the chariot of redemptive grace and new life which is guided by the sure hand of God. It comes for those neglectful ones who, though they have fallen down and lost their grip on the reins of life, nonetheless remember to look upward seeking knowledge and truth and beauty and purpose, those in whom the sleeping Christ has begun to rouse. It comes for those who are open to, and willing to be seen by, God.

When the disciples saw Jesus for who he truly was, they believed him. When we respond to the holy longing within and dare enough to drop our pretences and come before God in the communion of prayer, then we will discover for ourselves the glory of transfiguration: the revelation of eternal glory which is our rightful inheritance as God's sons and daughters. And by that revelation, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Something that must be believed to be seen.