

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles

Transfiguration Sunday– February 11, 2018

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Mark 9:2-9

FOR REFLECTION

“Whereas life separates meaning from emotion, art unites them. Story is an instrument by which you create such epiphanies at will, the phenomenon known as aesthetic emotion...Life on its own, without art to shape it, leaves you in confusion and chaos, but aesthetic emotion harmonizes what you know with what you feel to give you a heightened awareness and a sureness of your place in reality.”

~ Robert McKee (Actor, screenwriter), Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting

“Epiphanies are never convenient, and often arrive too late.”

~ Neal Shusterman (author), Challenger Deep

Non-Denominational Epiphanies

There are layers here. Let’s see if we can peel them away – like an onion – or a parfait.
(Shrek)

When we church people think of “Epiphany” with a capital “E” – we think of the story of the three “kings” meeting Jesus – or in loftier language:

...the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi
(Matthew 2:1–12).

Our Protestant festival commemorating the Epiphany is held on January 6 which, in our neighborhood in Pasadena which is predominantly Armenian, is Christmas Day.

Many Orthodox Christians in the United States celebrate Christmas Day on or near January 7 in the Gregorian calendar. This date works to be December 25 in the Julian calendar, which pre-dates the Gregorian calendar.

<https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/orthodox-christmas-day>

So, three royal guys recognize G-d in Jesus – they have an epiphany – a moment of recognition that there is “a manifestation of a divine or supernatural being.”

You may have noticed that our story this morning isn’t about the Magi. It is about something we call the Transfiguration. But this, too, is the story of an epiphany – best understood, again, through the Eastern Orthodox perspective:

In the Orthodox view the Transfiguration is not only a feast in honor of Jesus, but a feast of the Holy Trinity, for all three Persons of the Trinity are interpreted as being present at that moment: God the Father spoke from heaven; God the Son was the one being transfigured, and God the Holy Spirit was present in the form

of a cloud. In this sense, the transfiguration is also considered the "Small Epiphany" (the "Great Epiphany" being the Baptism of Jesus, when the Holy Trinity appeared in a similar pattern).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast_of_the_Transfiguration

In our story three people (not three magi) – Moses, Elijah and Jesus – have a meeting. It calls to mind a team meeting on the pitcher's mound where we can't hear what they are talking about and assume it's pretty important if the entire team is there.

These people are not just random. Moses, as you know, was a great liberator, chosen by G-d to lead and guide an entire nation into the promised land. His burial place was never found and many believed he was carried up to heaven before actually dying. Elijah was a great prophet who was also transported up to G-d without actually dying. One or both of these men were expected to return to earth "in the last days." Jesus, by the time this story was written, has already by resurrected and is presumed alive in G-d's house. This meeting proves he is of the same caliber as these previously "risen" heroes.

Three people witness this meeting – Peter, James and John, three of the most devoted disciples. They see Jesus' clothes "dazzle" – whiter than any human could make them – heavenly white. And Peter, always one to blurt something out before thinking, offers to build them tents to live in while they are visiting. "Tents" are traditionally considered dwellings for divine beings. (Keep that in mind as we describe our situation here as a base camp with a teen tent....)

All of this happens "up a high mountain" – actual geographical location undisclosed. We have three disciples climbing a mountain in a symbolic landscape. Three highly symbolic Jewish heroes meet and have a discussion. The three symbolic persons of the Christian Trinity are seen to be manifest in Voice, Jesus and Cloud. Thus, we have in this "transfiguration" moment a "small epiphany" – according to some traditions. And this story is put forth by the author in order to create a secondary epiphany for his readers – to confirm the divinity of Jesus as Christ or Messiah – to create a hopeful "aha" moment for a community disillusioned by his disappearance and lack of reappearance – so far....

However, epiphanies are not limited to Jewish or Christian tradition. They can be non-denominational – and many are secular.

An epiphany (from the ancient Greek ἐπιφάνεια, **epiphaneia**, "manifestation, striking appearance") is an experience of sudden and striking realization. Generally, the term is used to describe scientific breakthrough, religious or philosophical discoveries, but it can apply in any situation in which an enlightening realization allows a problem or situation to be understood from a

new and deeper perspective. Epiphanies are studied by psychologists and other scholars, particularly those attempting to study the process of **innovation**.

Epiphanies are relatively rare occurrences and generally follow a process of significant thought about a problem. Often, they are triggered by a new and key piece of information, but importantly, a depth of prior knowledge is required to allow the leap of understanding. Famous epiphanies include Archimedes's discovery of a method to determine the density of an object ("Eureka!") and Isaac Newton's realization that a falling apple and the orbiting moon are both pulled by the same force.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphany_\(feeling\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphany_(feeling))

In comparison, I had a very small, NOT famous epiphany a few months ago when I realized that as an installed minister, I had fewer tangible markers of progress in my work. As an interim or transitional minister, I had set tasks and accomplished them in a period of (usually) two years. Success was the calling of a new (hopefully perfectly matched) minister and my departure. My epiphany was that I needed to set short-term goals that could be accomplished and noted – in order to feel successful in my work. Ta da! Epiphany!

And I'm curious about you – what epiphanies, large or small, have you had in your life – recently or in the past?

And did they involve the manifestation of divine beings?

Or were they of a non-denominational or secular nature?

Did they lead to innovation?

To changes in the trajectory of your life?

Maren Tirabassi is a UCC minister and poet who gives away her writings in a blog called "Gifts in Open Hands." And her gift to us this morning is her take on this "small epiphany" – a detail of this transfiguration lifted up in a way that changes the way we might think about such visitations.

Transfiguration, 2018

Posted on February 11, 2018 by Maren C. Tirabassi

It's such a small detail in the shiny story –
getting to talk to folks
who have been gone a long time.

I would like Harriet Tubman, please,
that Moses
to walk and talk with me.
I want Langston Hughes,
dreams deferred in a still small voice.

Heck, I want Mark Twain,
Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson,
Susan B. Anthony, Cesar Chavez,
and Rosa Parks.
I promise not to keep you –
I gave up booth-building
a long, long time ago.

Also Mama ... Mama?

Scripture Reading for Sunday February 11, 2018 – Transfiguration – Year B

Mark 9:2-9

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. :7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.