

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Transfiguration Sunday – February 26, 2017
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

2 Peter 1:16-21

For Reflection

“When the Sun of compassion arises darkness evaporates and the singing birds come from nowhere.”

— Amit Ray, Nonviolence: The Transforming Power
Amit Ray is an enlightened spiritual master in the Himalayan Yoga and Vipassana tradition (India)

Light in a Dark Place

If you remember, the story of the Transfiguration begins this way:

Matthew 17

1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

This is the story that is being referenced by the author of the **Second Letter of Peter** – who is not Peter but someone writing in his name to defend his message after his death. The “defense” is very clear here, saying for instance:

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.

And:

19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

We saw it and G-d told us how to interpret it – so you'd better believe it! Just so YOU all know, they had the same problem we do now – that of “alternative facts” being presented as truth. So, we must come to this text with a certain amount of skepticism, on guard for hypocrisy and remembering that claiming to NOT be mythical does NOT make it so.

That said, there are some pretty good words of advice in Second Peter that could enhance our lives. Let's take a look and you can decide for yourself. Earlier in chapter 1 the author says this:

2 Peter 1:

2 May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His [Jesus'] divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature.

5 For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, 7 and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. 8 For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For anyone who lacks these things is short-sighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. 10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. 11 For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

**Faith
Goodness
Knowledge
Self-control
Endurance
G-dliness
Mutual Affection
Love**

That's a good list of mutually supportive personal qualities and virtues to keep taped to our mirrors for daily contemplation.

I believe it is these things that "You will do well to be attentive to...as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

These are the things that rise to the top in most times of darkness, tragedy, disaster.

I was serving the UCC in Northridge when the 1994 earthquake hit. In a community where most people kept to themselves, commuted to work and minded their own business – there was a sudden surge of neighborliness, cooperation and mutual support. People were checking on each other, helping each other "dig out" from the debris, finding lost pets, offering advice about how to handle insurance. On one block where they lost electricity and therefore had food spoiling in refrigerators, neighbors

pulled grills out into the street, cooked things up before they spoiled and shared their feasts picnic style. Churches, normally locked during the week, opened their doors so that people living in their cars, afraid to go into their houses, could use the facilities and wash up. There was a lot of goodness going around. It didn't last forever, but it was awesome to behold as long as it lasted.

We all saw what happened after the 9-11 attacks. The first and second and third responders were absolute heroes. Their goodness could not be quantified.

The movie "Patriot's Day" about the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing features exactly that – the goodness and strength and endurance and love that sprang out of that dark time.

We see this in our personal lives when someone is sick or hurt – when someone has died or suddenly disabled. Many of us have been or are dealing with elderly parents and relatives – and the Village has come through. My dad cracked his femur Tuesday afternoon this week; neighbors, family, friends formed a network of support immediately – that continues while I'm standing here – seeing him through the ER to surgery, to his recovery room and transfer to skilled nursing yesterday, and now through painful rehab, PT and regaining of strength so he can go home as soon as possible – stronger than he's been in years.

I believe he has yet to be alone – as visitors come in a long stream with pastoral care, neighborly concern, unsolicited medical advice, encouragement for the work ahead, admonishments to take better care, offers of walking partners and distribution of chores at home so Dad can avoid another "topple." His physical therapist at the hospital was a high school friend of my brother's – all grown up. His doctors know all his other doctors and have mutual respect. [One of his nurses was upset because she got transferred to other patients and she wanted to stay with Dad.] All of this has been woven together with long conversations – stories about mutual past events and relationships, political commentaries, theological reminders, and lots of laughter. We had to close the door to his room because of the volume of our interactions.

This is light in the darkness. This is the "sun of compassion" bringing birdsong and hope. This is a sharing of the life-force – keeping all of us back from the brink of mortality – on solid ground. Has anyone seen the kids' movie Kung-Fu Panda III – continuing Po's "legendary adventures of awesomeness"? I recommend it (and one and two as well) highly. But I will share with you that it is the entire Village sharing ALL of their CHI with Po that saves the day. The imagery is an amazing LIGHT show. And darkness has no chance.

As for our national political situation, I saw an article yesterday that made the morning star rise in my heart. The headline reads:

"Obama lawyers form 'worst-case scenario' group to tackle Trump"

And it announced:

Top lawyers who helped the Obama White House craft and hold to rules of conduct believe President Donald Trump and his staff will break ethics norms meant to guard against politicization of the government — and **they've formed a new group to prepare, and fight.**

United to Protect Democracy, which draws its name from a line in President Barack Obama's farewell address that urged his supporters to pick up where he was leaving off, has already raised a \$1.5 million operating budget, hired five staffers and has plans to double that in the coming months. They've incorporated as both a 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4), allowing them to operate as a nonprofit but participate in some forms of political advocacy as well.

While other Trump opponents focus on taking the president to court over the travel ban and deportations, the new group plans to drill into issues that aren't already hitting the headlines, like potential intervention in and intimidation of regulatory agencies by West Wing staff.

I feel like someone has our back – that Obama isn't gone, his legacy will continue to protect and fight for and with us. This, for me, is truly light in the darkness.

You may remember that a past minister of this church once said, "There is a light here..." Mt. Hollywood UCC is a keeper and distributor of the light. We are in the business of HOPE – not to mention:

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Mutual Affection
Love**

We are in the right place for these times.
Thanks be to G-d!

2 Peter 1:16-21

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. **You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.** 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Children's Time "Teaching Without Words"
rip book – hypocrisy –children see what we do more than they hear what we say