

February 27, 2022

Give Me that Transfiguration Shine

Luke 9:27 – 36

What are we to make of the story of Jesus shining and his disciples covered in a cloud? Shining is a biblical symbol for displaying the glory of God. Jesus says, "The righteous will **shine** like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43). In the Transfiguration – our story today – Jesus' face is shining. What's shining got to do with Jesus and with us?

Who would want to have a shining face? After worship one Sunday morning, a lady said to me, "Dr. K you had a green aura around your face this morning. It was the presence of the Holy Spirit." I didn't want to burst her spiritual moment, but the church had colored windows and one of the larger portions of one window was green. That morning, the sun was shining through the green glass and reflecting on my face.

I believe that many Christians have decided that shining like a star means getting really involved in telling people they should be ashamed. I had an aunt who majored in shaming. In the hot heat of summer, I would run our country road without a shirt. My aunt would see me run by her house. She would drive out to the road and wait for me, stop me, and say, "You should be ashamed of yourself out here running half-naked in the road." Instead, of shining, we have become shamers. Shaming is not shining. God doesn't get glory from our attempts to shame people for being different. Shaming leads to discrimination, prejudice, violation of human rights, violence, and death. There's a wrong kind of shaming that doesn't help people change; it makes them more determined to stay the same. Liberals have a pedagogy of shame. They shame people, but they forget that they learned shaming from the people they are shaming. People become stubborn, defensive, when shamed.

Shamers don't like being shamed. It doesn't mean they are right; it means that reject being shamed. Instead of calling people racists, allow the hot heat of the gospel to shine on that patch of darkness.

There are Christians who are sneaky shamers. They will suck you in and you will fall for it every time. I went to dinner with a group of church members. The lady sitting next to me asked, "Rev. would you like a glass of wine." I said, "I'd love a glass, would you like one?" She would smile, "No, I don't think Christians should drink." She got more pleasure out of not drinking wine and shaming me for drinking wine than I did from drinking wine, and she doubled her pleasure by shaming me in front of the other church members. Shaming people has a demonic way of bringing joy to the shamer – the glint in the eye, the smirk, the straightening of the posture, the sense of moral superiority – it is the joy of the shamer that makes shame such a powerful tool of oppression.

The churches bear a lot of responsibility for this epidemic of shaming because churches have long produced guilt as a way of manipulating and controlling people. Guilt and shame are on the same team. Does the church still have a "Shame List"? The church once shamed people who suffered from divorce, unmarried pregnant girls and the unremitting, harsh, shaming of gays, lesbians, and the ongoing harsh shaming of transgender persons in our society.

I know that shamers want everything to be exactly right, but being discontent, ill-tempered, judgmental, and sneaky toward people you think don't measure up, is not the way to shine. The gospel is not about shaming. I believe the gospel changes people for the better. If you show up regularly for the scripture, the anthem, the sermon, the communion – over time you will change. If you don't want to change, you should only come to church once in a blue moon. But if you are regular in worship, if

you allow the word to encourage you, mold your attitude, fix your bad habits, change what needs changing, you will be different.

Look, John says the light shines in the darkness. Well, we live in dark times, and it is time for Christians to shine so that the darkness can't overcome the light. Just now, in the gathering darkness of rank evil, like that of Putin, we cannot rely on just the words of the past or the heroes of yesteryear. Now, we must Velcro our courage to the sticking point and shine in the darkness like Abraham Lincoln for the Union's sake, like Martin Luther King, Jr. for the sake of Civil Rights, like Herman Melville shining the light of his dark writing on the evils of slavery, like the Mississippi Freedom Riders singing, "This little light of mine." "The song became a force" (Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 5).

In the darkness of county jails, "This little light of mine." In the face of policemen with fire hoses and dogs, "This little light of mine." In the aftermath of church bombings, after students were gunned down with a shotgun by Thomas Coleman, when Mrs. Hamer was beaten in the jail in Winona, the guards had two Black prisoners to whip her with a studded leather strap until she couldn't get up, "This little light of mine."

And the darkness did not overcome. There's a new rising of the old Jim Crow darkness loose in our democracy today, and I say unto you, that the little light will rise again from the ordinary people, and it will shine, shine, shine, and the darkness will not win. The idea that everyone has some part of freedom's light needs to be broadcast around the world. "This little light of mine, let it shine. Let it shine." We must shine, we must sing, and we must scream against the encroaching darkness. Any place, any time where someone attempts to snuff out the light of freedom, we must shine like stars in the darkness. We are all God's freedom riders.

If the gospel gets to us, really gets inside us, we will shine. The Gospel increases your empathy for people. The Gospel gets our compassion in high gear. The Gospel gets us to valuing every human life so that we are more concerned about the difficulty that transgenders may have than you are about bathroom legislation in the state legislature. The Gospel teaches us that persons matter more than rules. The gospel gets us to see persons as children of God, people created in the image of God, and "you get to where you can't stand it when they are hurt."

When Jimmy Carter was president, he was known for his wide, bright, shining smile. A political cartoon artist depicted a scene in a dark bedroom with only a bright set of shining teeth showing. Beneath the shining smile, the words of Mrs. Carter, "For God's sake, Jimmy turn that thing off and go to sleep." Well, when the gospel gets to us, we can't stop shining! The gospel fills our hearts with empathy. When the gospel "gets ahold of us," we want everyone, every institution, every agency, every government to be filled with care, empathy, justice, empowerment, help, and goodness.

The transfiguration story is a story about shining. Jesus shining means he covered by the glory of God. It's encouragement for all that he is about to face in his trial and crucifixion. Luke calls it his departure. Transfiguration is preparation for death. It shows that death will not be able to defeat Jesus. Some think the transfiguration is a misplaced resurrection story. Perhaps Luke wanted to give Jesus the resurrection look.

How can we shine like Jesus? Luke has given us a glorious set of symbols. Moses and Elijah stand for the Law and the Prophets – aka the word of God. The dazzling appearance of Jesus stands for the presence of God. The voice from heaven is God encouraging Jesus.

What do you think? Is the gospel trying to get your attention? Do you want to be affected by the Gospel? You might not want to,

but if you hang around here, you are going to hear the Gospel and you will start opening your heart and mind to the gospel and then you will shine. When the gospel fills your life, you shine even in the dark.