

Immanuel United Church
Transfiguration Sunday / Stewardship Sunday 2021
Feb 14th, 2021

Prelude

Welcome

Call to Worship: The work of Christmas by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flock,

The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations,

To bring peace among others,

To make music in the heart.

Lighting the Christ Candle

Prayer:

Loving God, our sacred story promises a future with hope. As we worship today, show us the role we, your people, play in embodying that hopeful future and seeing it in everyone we meet. Align us with your dreams for our lives and our world. Turn us toward potential. Instill in us a deep oneness with your spiritual mission. Let your love be our guide. Amen.

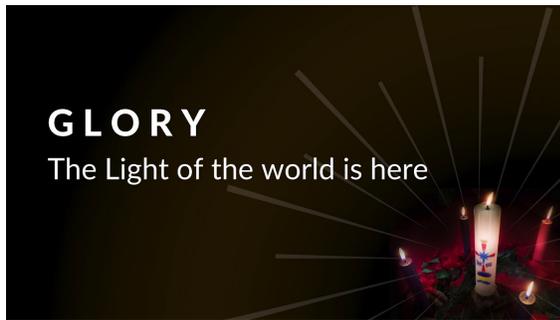


Hymn: VU *I am the Light of the World*

Scripture: Mark 9:2-9

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, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with

Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 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.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 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.



Music for Contemplation: ***Light of the World***
by Lauren Daigle

Message: Good News is here.

In today's reading, the Light of the World is on the Mountaintop. As if a starlight has fallen from the sky. The comet's bright blue flames are no longer seen. He is like a dark crater that marks the earth after the fall and the land becomes fertile again. He is the wild highlands, the cradle of all life. Jesus, who represents everything above and everything that is life-giving and life-transforming, is also the Human One (the Son of Man, in NRSV). In today's story of transfiguration, he is with his three disciples. V. 2, "Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves."

Western Christianity celebrates this Sunday, which is the last one after the Epiphany and the one Sunday before Lent begins, as Transfiguration Sunday. This day, we present the story of Jesus's transfiguration. This means that Jesus shows his true identity, the Epiphany Star, the Light of the World, via the event and moment of his appearance being transfigured with the bright "dazzling white", representing the ultimate character of martyrdom which is his mission and destination on the cross. The brilliant white light foretells both his death and his resurrection. This day of Transfiguration is the turning point in Jesus's ministry and journey. After this day, after he descends to the village from the mountain, Jesus is going to Jerusalem to face down the powers of empire and religious authority. He will die there, and yet no blood stain will remain on his body and on his clothes (to be "dazzling white") "such as no one on earth could bleach them", when "the Human One rises from the dead". (V. 3 & 9)

This phenomenal moment of transfiguration in which Jesus reveals his true identity, the light and the glory as the Messiah, as the Epiphany Star pointed on Christmas Eve, must come to the mind and heart of the three disciples as GOOD NEWS. It is absolutely GOOD NEWS for Peter, James and John. They, especially Peter, believed in Triumphalism. They believed the Messiah

would come, and the Holy One will cleanse away evil from the earth and turn the world upside down and bring peace and triumph for Israel and the oppressed. This must be GOOD NEWS for those who follow Jesus. The disciples will sit next to Jesus on his throne, indeed on his right and left, with increased power and position, when the new Kingdom comes. For Peter, the Good News does not need to be a grand vision like the Kingdom. A humble monastic common life would be fine too — The massive holiness of Jesus, Moses and Elijah suffices all the spiritual needs Peter would ever have in his life! THIS IS GOOD NEWS!

Everything in the mount of transfiguration is aglow now. A great bright cloud overshadows their sights; a voice comes down from the cloud: “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him!” like a thunder, guaranteeing success and a bright future. Israel’s greatest heroes, the most prominent ancestors, Moses and Elijah, are talking to Jesus. THIS IS GREAT NEWS.

Like the disciples, Peter, James and John, we hunger for good news. We would dash and hunt down the good news. Good news, Great news, Greater news! We express that we starve, thirst, hunger to find them. See them. Hear them. Touch them. Hold them. The praise song we listened to, Light of the World, sings about our prayer and hope so well:

The world waits for a miracle

The heart longs for a little bit of hope

Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel

A child prays for peace on Earth

And she's calling out from a sea of hurt

Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel

One evening in November this year, I turned on the radio on the way to the church to gather with our folks. The bombardment of terrible and awful news relentlessly hit my eardrums in the voice of the anchor of CBC News at 6 pm. It went on, one after another, for the entire thirty minutes. It was enough to paralyze my brain from deep breathing. It just took half an hour for my thinking to be narrowed and tunnelled into dark and shadowed terrain. Until I saw the green grass at the Back Forty and the orange sunset in the West at our backyard of Immanuel, I was unaware of what had happened to my brain and thinking. Then, I was greeted by Judy G’s bright smile. I opened my eyes anew to the light everywhere. When I was able to share with her this experience of getting rabbit holed into the flood of negative, sensational news, Judy smiled and answered with wit: “That’s why two local girls started Good News Now.” Of course I searched for it at home. Here it is. (Show the video: <https://www.fox29.com/news/local-girls-start-newscast-to-focus-on-positive-stories-during-pandemic>) These girls absolutely rock’n roll the positivity to the world.

Like the disciples, Peter, James and John, we want good news. Also, it is probably true that everyone has a different experience or opinion about what they would consider to be good news. To us, Christians, who seek to follow the footsteps of Jesus, good news does not just mean uplifting, cheerful and happy news that makes us feel good.

In today's transfiguration story, Peter, James and John are not ready yet to fully comprehend what Good News should truly mean to them. The disciples needed more experience with Jesus and to witness more in order to fully understand Jesus' true identity: from triumphal Messiah to suffering Servant. Jesus' transfiguration occurred in the middle point of the whole Gospel; a Mountain top divide that bridges the ascent and the descent: Jesus' birth and baptism, and Jesus' journey toward the cross. Jesus is preparing himself for his imminent showdown with the powers in Jerusalem which would result in his execution and resurrection. Jesus was seeking the footsteps of his ancestors: Moses was rejected by his people initially, and had to ascend Mount Sinai a second time, returning with tablets and his face transfigured, aglow with the kiss of God. Elijah was hunted by authorities he had challenged and after staying in the mountain as God told him, he returned to face the powers.

We, Immanuel United Church, have been, and will continue to strive to be the station of good news — following the model and the footsteps of Jesus. Scripture is a very effective guide — We can study and contemplate the way of Jesus, and embody it in our actions and words, always keeping our integrity and truth in the face of the powers and principals in the world. Good news comes with the cost of discipleship. Disciples take up the mantle of their mentors. Faithfully following the call of the Creator in our lives is how we seek, “hunt down” and share the Good News of today. There are so many attractions and distractions in the world that hinder us from becoming the effective hunter of good news. It seems that the news and events that spiral us down to despair and negative thinking are often sensational in character. Being sensational, or making things sensational, usually leads to the capital increase in various industries. Probably that's why there are so many rabbit holes pulling us into more terrible news than good news.

Good news is not just out there. Good News is always here. It's not what we can hear only when we look for it outside, as if somebody else should come and tell us. Jesus is Good News. Being mindful each and every day, every moment, and tuning our mind, heart and body's wavelength in to the tapping of God in the world is how we become an effective good news hunter. Try to look for, notice, and acknowledge what is working with you. Even now. What is good now? Genuine. Compassionate. Loving. Just. What contributes to the well-being of ourselves and our family and friends now?. And try to keep mindful of them always. Seed them. Sustain them. Water them. Grow them continuously and with intention. This effort surely brings back to us the Judy G's effect: letting you calm down, greeted by the bright smile of the Sunset (or Sunrise). It helps us stand away from panic and paralysis, from discouraging news.

The key is to be mindful. Focus on what works now. Avoid sensational things.

Good News is here at Immanuel too. I don't think we are quite sensational. (Joking). However, I have noticed and witnessed over the three and a half years with you that even though we may be like Canaan's lowest dry land, quite low, quite hidden, and yet good hunters have found us and become our members, family and friends. The fact that we are an affirming congregation and our leaders work hard to continue to engage with young people and families in our midst have brought new friends to become our new family members.

The Light of the World is with Immanuel. Jesus has been our wild highlands, Sun-filled mountaintop, the cradle of life for us. Our Good News is not sensational. Our Good News is Jesus. Our Good News helps us to embrace and contemplate all aspects of our life: love and grief, receiving support and giving support in their complexity, in their truth, with courage, with faith, in gentle spirit. Jesus, who is the fertile land that grows everything that is life-giving and life-transforming/transfiguring, is also the Human One who invites us to the costly discipleship of love. Even today, Jesus asks us to come with him, and to climb the mount of transfiguration with him and witness and change.

Hymn: MV 143 ***We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky*** (Abundant Life)

Prayers of the People:

In the wilderness, you make a way.

In the desert, you carve a river.

You draw us toward a fresh start, O God.

We give you thanks for the times when your Spirit has been apparent in our journey, when we have witnessed your goodness in each other, and when we have sensed your wisdom in this community.

We are grateful.

Turn our gratitude to your mission and ministry,
at Immanuel, at our home,
and in the world.

May your goodness and wisdom continue to bless us now.

May we sense your grace and let it guide us:

all of us who serve Immanuel United Church with a hopeful and loving heart, and
our six mission Clusters and Council:

Stewardship of Financial Resources (with responsibility for the financial well-being of the congregation)

Caring for our Faith Community (for care and upkeep of the church property and building, as well as for hospitality and welcome, and the pastoral care and support of all within the congregation)

Discernment of Gifts (for ensuring the ongoing discernment of spiritual gifts within and among the participants in the congregation)

Life-long Learning and Faith Formation (for Christian education and faith formation)

Worship (for all aspects of the worship and oversight of the sacraments)

Living our Faith in the World (for the work that resists evil and seeks positive change for peace and justice in the wider world)

Affirming Ministry; Winnipeg Harvest; River Elm School Breakfast, Just Christmas; Amnesty International;

Council (for continually discerning the mission of the congregation)

Wednesday and Thursday Study Groups; Men's Study Group;

Communication Team;

Staff members;

Immanuel Choir members;

and all those who support our community with time, treasure and talent;

Remind us, O God, that we are always leaving an impression on the world you so lovingly created for us. Everything we think, say, and do leaves a mark.

Bless us as we gather to consider the impact we already have and can have on our community and the world. Deepen our commitment to live out the spiritual mission to which you call us.

Ours, O God, is a mission of hope.

Ours, O God, is a mission of peace.

Ours, O God, is a mission of love.

For we believe hope, peace, and love are hallmarks of your mission, O God.

Today, help us recommit ourselves to join anew our ministry with a hopeful, peaceful, loving heart. Amen.

Hymn: VU 639 ***One More Step Along the World I Go***

Benediction:

May God of the journey go before you, preparing your way.

Scatter generosity around God's beautiful world,

with our God who encourages us on behind us.

She breaks open the kernel of every good thing we do, however small. Therefore,

Go with the Creator who broadens our horizon beyond us.

Go with Christ who anchors our path below us.

Go with the Spirit who becomes our companion and friend, beside us. Amen.