

Transfiguration Sunday

Trinity, Herkimer

It's important today that we not ignore the ugly details coming out of Ukraine, with bombs falling and thousands huddled in subway stations seeking safety. It's important that we stand in the shoes of those 13 soldiers posted on an island who were the front line and first casualties against an unprovoked attack by a neighboring country.

We will hear any number of explanations for these actions. In fact, Mr. Putin claims this military action is necessary to protect Russia from the West, and to remove Nazis from Ukraine. In truth, he wants to expand his empire like every strongman before him. This is a brutal attempt to secure the glory of this world using power the way this world understands.

We are watching the celebration of power and might without regard for the destruction left in its wake. And even though we live half a world away, we would be foolish to think that we are protected from the madness of this power grab - for madmen have little sense of boundaries, and an exaggerated sense of their own importance. The people of Ukraine are frightened, and all the world should rightly be frightened along with them. There is a bully loose in international waters. Let not our prayers flag.

Today this all stands in stark contrast to the transfiguration glory we encounter on the top of a mountain in the nation of Israel 2000 years ago. So, I am certain that our task today is not to find some hidden meaning in this story about Moses and Elijah and building booths and the voice of God. Our task today is to wrestle with these two competing dramas – the glory on the mountain v. the glory of might.

If we have learned anything during this week of tanks and bombs, death and destruction it is this: we do not live at the top of a mountain, surrounded by angels and the glory of the Divine. Our lives are versions of the desperate father in Luke's gospel whose son continues to throw himself into the fire.

But I think it is important today that we wrestle with our expectations of our faith, our assumptions about God's promises to us in Jesus, and just

possibly to re-evaluate how often we convince ourselves that it is our own righteousness that keeps us safe.

Let me say that in a different way. To believe in the Jesus on the top of the mountain is to accept the glory that he offers, a glory that stands at the end of a journey which includes a cross. Jesus doesn't call any disciples – then or now – to follow him into a land of safe havens. Jesus – the one born human yet revealed to be divinely chosen – calls us to trust that his way is the way that leads to a depth of life that is beyond our imagining – it is a life that holds us through war zones and hospital wards and economic disaster.

Every gospel telling of the Transfiguration comes immediately after Jesus first announces the cross. Jesus says it plainly: he will be rejected, suffer and die and on the third day rise again. That's the path laid out for him; the path he will take.

And I expect it came as a shock to his disciples. I expect they thought they were on the path to glory – an easing of the pressures and oppressions of this world. Don't we carry just such hopes with us as well? That our belief in Jesus, supported by correct morals and solemn ritual secures our future? That somehow we are paying our dues with our acts of kindness and are deserving of reward and comfort?

Peter, James and John were overcome by the presence of the Divine on that mountain – call it glory or a cloud or a voice – but it had only one message: this Jesus is the chosen one, listen to him.

Enter into the silence of God. Empty yourself; quiet the noise in your head and in your heart and stand in the fullness of the silence of God. Moses did that on a Mountain, then dragged Israel through a desert for 40 years. Elijah was hiding from his enemies on a mountain when God came to him – not in the earthquake or the fire or the wind – but in the sheer sound of silence- that space where only God is present.

Listen well so you will recognize God's voice in the future when some madman calls for violence against your neighbor or when this life crushes you and **all is lost.** THEN you will need the presence of God to hold you and to hear the voice of God saying 'Be still, and know that I am God.

Every year we read the story of the Transfiguration – this wonderful scene at the top of a mountain where we catch a glimpse of who God is -r on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday the day set aside to remind us of our own human frailty. For the days are surely coming when we will need that glimpse of the Divine to steady us through the war zone.

Today, the human Jesus is revealed as the Chosen one of God, the one who promises that a path of life can be found in him. Jesus comes for our sake, and the glorified Jesus shows us what reality can be even in the midst of what is today.

The life of faith involves standing in the silence and trusting in the promise that is Jesus. We follow paths of compassion and mercy, grace and generosity trusting that Jesus is somehow at work – in us as well as in others.

And we pray, that the madman will put down his weapons and the Spirit will lead us in the paths of peace.