In the Name of One God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

You know that game: which of these things is not like the other? It’s really easy to play:
Which of these things is not like the other?

Car, truck, pancakes?
The Super Bowl, the World Series, the Decalogue?
Ghandi, Tutu, Ted Cruz?

We could go on (really!), but the reason I start with this is that when I think of the story from Luke’s Gospel that we just heard, I see three different pieces on which I could choose to focus this sermon: there is the dazzling vision of Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, Peter’s response to the vision, and the ministry of healing which takes place at the foot of the mountain.

Which of these things is not like the other?

For me, I can easily identify with Peter’s response (I often want to freeze time, remain with the ones I love, not face the pain of separation) and with the need of people of faith to do the work of ministry on the ground and in community (there is no doubt that we are called to serve the marginalized, work for healing, follow Christ’s example). What is harder to identify with is an encounter with God that leaves me speechless.

Not only is this encounter with the light of Christ different from the other aspects of the story in how it relates to our lives and work today, it is also different from anything the disciples had come to expect as well, different from anything else they had witnessed, understood or imagined — about God and about themselves.

In her book the Irrational Season (p 194), in which she writes reflections and poetry about the different liturgical seasons of the church year, one of my favorite authors, Madeline L’Engle, writes about the transfiguration:

Suddenly they saw him the way he was
the way he really was all the time,
although they had never seen it before,
the glory which blinds the everyday eye
and so becomes invisible. This is how
he was, radiant, brilliant, carrying joy
like a flaming sun in his hands.
This is the way he was – is – from the beginning,
and we cannot bear it. So he manned himself,
came manifest to us; and there on the mountain
they saw him, really saw him, saw his light.
We all know that is we really see him we die,
But isn’t that what is required of us?
Then, perhaps, we will see each other, too.

I think it is hard to enter into the mystical, the mysterious, implausible story we encounter today for many reasons: most of us have never had such an experience of God, having visions of dead people talking with our friends is generally frowned upon, we read Scripture with perhaps too much reason for our own good, we are scared of the exposure which might result from entering into all that light, what it might mean for us to understand our place in it, and the place of everyone around us; we are scared of what the story calls us to...after all, what does it mean to be changed into Christ’s likeness from glory to glory and what are the implications of our own transformation in the world today?

What does it mean to see ourselves as God see us? To be given eyes to see the light shining in, on, around and among us all – the light that is the essence of Jesus Christ, God incarnate – a light that glows within each of us?

Someone who studied with Henri Nouwen took some time to reflect on Nouwen’s perspective regarding the transfiguration, “[Important] is the question of how we view those around us,” he writes. “If we believe that we are the Beloved of God than we should be becoming the beloved of God and it’s then that we see with a new set of eyes that those around us are also the Beloved of God, even when these other people don’t believe this about themselves. When we have eyes that see transfiguration, we see those around us as they really are (Mike Motley*).

Thomas Merton puts it this way in his description of his famous revelation in downtown Louisville as described in Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander:

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness… This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud… I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”

How do you see those walking around you? Those in your neighborhood, work, community, pew? Can you recognize the light shining from them? Do you need to meet them on the mountain top to recognize the light in them? Or can you let their light wash over you, pierce you, transform you – right here in our day-to-day, foot of the mountain, ordinary lives?

And, what about your own light? Your glory? How brightly it shines?

The light in this sanctuary alone is enough to transform the world.

In just a few days we will enter into the darkness of Lent, we will begin our journey towards Jerusalem, towards the cross, and that moment in which darkness seemed to triumph.

Recognizing this, we put ourselves in the same place as the disciples who, only eight days prior to our story this morning, heard both the promise and the peril that awaited Jesus and his followers.

Observing a holy lent, a time of prayer, fasting and repentance, we will prepare ourselves to meet Jesus again on the road to Jerusalem. If we open ourselves up to the journey and allow it to affect us, to move
us - we will likely experience some of what the disciples experienced up on the mountain – hope, confusion, anxiety, fear.

One commentator describes this paradox of what they experienced and the implications of all they encountered this way: "while there is nothing they can do to save themselves from suffering, there is also no way the [disciples] can shield themselves from the light of God that sheds hope in their darkest moments. The mountain was the way for God to prepare a human band of companions for the sacred journey, to offer something to hold onto when they descend into the crushing reality of the world below (Mayetta Madeleine Anschutz in Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1, p 456)."

She continues, "The moment of transfiguration is that point at which God says to the world and to each of us that there is nothing we can do to prepare for or stand in the way of joy or sorrow. We cannot build God a monument, and we cannot keep God safe.

We also cannot escape the light that God will shed on our path. We cannot escape God, Immanuel walking among us (Anschutz, p 456)."

I would add that we also cannot escape the light coming from all those he walks among.

All those who walked through the doors of this church this morning.

And all those who we will encounter when we return home.

“Suddenly they saw him the way he was the way he really was all the time, although they had never seen it before, the glory which blinds the everyday eye and so becomes invisible. “

Suddenly they saw.

Suddenly.

We see.

Alleluia. Alleluia Alleluia.

Amen.