

**“Right in Front of Your Face”**  
**Matthew 17:1-9**  
**February 26, 2017**  
**The Rev. Mark W. Jennings**

I guess it was a couple of weeks ago that we had some pretty good winds around here. There were some power outages around Southwest Michigan, but not too much serious damage. So how surprised was I when I took the dogs out for a walk last Sunday and notice two large silver cylinders in our backyard. “What are those?” I thought. And then I looked closer and then I looked up a little bit to our roof. That's when I noticed that the chimney from our wood burning stove was no longer on our roof but had fallen into our back yard, obviously knocked over by the wind, breaking into two pieces as it landed in the yard. So I took the dogs in and said to Erin, “Did you see the chimney from the wood-burner had been knocked over in the wind?” She said, “Where?!” I pulled the curtain aside and showed her the parts of the chimney lying in the back yard. She asked me when that happened. I said it must have happened last Sunday night during all that wind. That's when she got that look in her eye. You all know that look, right? The one of disbelief, but she really does believe it because it's happened before. “You mean to tell me that you've been walking the dogs in the backyard all week and never noticed a six foot length of eight inch pipe lying in the yard or that there wasn't a chimney on the roof anymore?” Well . . . I said. “It was right there in front of your face all week!” Yes it was. Right there in front of my face. Maybe it's a guy thing and maybe some of you women are nodding because you could see your husbands or sons doing the same thing. Because it is true that sometimes a thing is right in front of our face and we never even notice it.

The story of the Transfiguration is not all that different. This story is later in the Gospel of Matthew, in Chapter 17. The disciples have already been with Jesus for a long while. They have heard his teaching, been with him when he healed the sick, saw him feed the 5,000, even watched him walk on water. Then there's this story which is supposed to reveal his identity, supposed to show them who this is that they have been living with for the last couple of years. This story is supposed to reveal to them

once and for all that this is the Son of God. Do they not get it yet? He's been right there in front of their faces all this time! The story of the Transfiguration tells us that Jesus is revealed for who he really is, the divine Son of God. But at the same time isn't he also the human son of Mary? Yes, he is. He is both Emmanuel, God with us, and the carpenter from Nazareth. He is divine and human. But for some reason, Peter, James and John are having trouble seeing the divine shine through, even though he has been right there in front of their faces. And so they are taken to the mountaintop, and here, for at least a moment, they see the holiness break through.

Have you ever seen that? Have you ever had a moment in which it seemed that something holy, divine was in touch with your earthly existence? Have you ever seen anyone or anything transfigured? Have you ever seen the earthly transformed into the heavenly? Maybe you haven't. Maybe that has never happened to you. Maybe moments like the Transfiguration of Jesus are once in a lifetime, once in a millenium moments, never to be repeated. . . . Or maybe not. Maybe moments like this are right in front of our faces, but we never look. Maybe holiness is breaking through all around us.

That's hard to believe for some of us. We look around and see all the divisions, all the name calling, all the dislike that exists in our society and our world. If you don't look like me, if we don't speak the same language, if we don't believe the same things about God, if our ancestors didn't come from the same part of the world, if we don't vote for the same people, if we don't get our news from the same place, why should I have anything to do with you? So often that is the attitude that so many people have, people in our country and around the world. So where's the holiness? Where's the transfiguration? One bad thing just keeps happening right after another.

But then if we really stop to look. "Hmmm . . . long lengths of pipe in the yard . . . strong winds . . . roof looks different . . . Hey, our chimney fell down! Hmmm . . . pure white clothes . . . Moses and Elijah . . . the teachings . . . the feeding of the hungry . . . Hey, this Jesus just might be the Messiah, the Holy One." If we just look around.

On January 28<sup>th</sup>, just a little less than a month ago in the town of Victoria, Texas, on the Gulf coast

south of Houston, arsonists burned down the only Islamic mosque in Victoria. Burned to the ground. Now there are only about 100 Muslims in Victoria so they don't have a lot of resources to rebuild. But then one after another, religious leaders in Victoria came to the imam, the leader of the mosque, with keys. Each one saying, "here's a key to our building, our church, come use our space to worship. Here take the key." Included in that group was the leader of the local synagogue. Now there are fewer Jews in Victoria than there are Muslims, but the synagogue opened its doors to that Muslim community. I don't know what their insurance situation is with such a small congregation, but the next week they had set up a "Gofundme" page on the internet, hoping to raise \$850,000 to rebuild. In two days they had more than \$900,000. Holiness. Transfiguration. Right in front of our faces.

This last weekend there was an incident of vandalism in the Jewish section of a cemetery in St. Louis. About 200 Jewish headstones were knocked over or broken. This is only one incident of anti-Semitic vandalism and there have been numerous bomb threats against synagogues and Jewish centers over the last few weeks. Upsetting and tragic. But then did you see that Muslims Unite pledged to raise \$20,000 by the 21<sup>st</sup> of March to help restore the Jewish cemetery? By March 21<sup>st</sup>. They had \$20,000 in three hours. And CAIR, the Council on American Islamic Relations announced a reward for the apprehension of people connected with the bomb threats, because they said, they had been touched by the Jewish support for Muslims who had been persecuted. Holiness. Transfiguration.

One of the strange things about this human existence of ours is that there moments when we realize we are walking on holy ground. Maryetta Anschutz says, "We glimpse that moment in a hospital room as we sit with two people who have just heard the worst news of their lives and watch the patient reach out to assure the companion, the healthy one, that all will be well. We glimpse that moment when the evening news reflects nothing but chaos, and then there is one story of a person's graceful act of healing a broken world by caring for another person the world would rather forget."<sup>1</sup> These are the moments when we realize that God is not just present in our hymns of triumph and joy, and in the flowers of

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1 Anschutz, Maryetta Madeleine, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, vol. 1, p. 454.*

spring, but also in suffering and sacrifice, and in the dark of winter. If we weren't so blind we might see holiness all around us. We might realize that all time can be sacred, any place a mountain of transfiguration, and all ground is holy ground.