

Luke 9:28-43

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" ---not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen;



Luke 9:37-43.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son. he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

"Coming Down From the Mountain"

Last Sunday during children's time in worship at a UCC/ Disciples Christian Church in Austin, Texas, the pastor asked the question: "How do you know God loves everyone, not just certain people?" My granddaughter Rose raised her hand and replied: "God certainly wouldn't have made someone if they weren't meant to be loved!" "Wow!" exclaimed the pastor. "You should go to seminary!" That afternoon Facebook fans added to his thoughts. Her mother commented: "She could also go to work for Hallmark." Rose's aunt wrote: "I'm not a fan of Hallmark, but I'm a big advocate of the idea that everybody is worthy of being treated with love." Cousin Jim said: "Smart girl!" My addition? "That's probably how I should have preached my sermon this morning!" A couple of days later, Rose asked her mother: "What does 'stressed' mean?" Mom's Facebook comment was: "It must be nice to be a seven year old."

About two thousand years ago, in a seminary chapel high on a mountaintop, three of Jesus' disciples heard a voice from the cloud say to them: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35) That day on the mount of transfiguration, Peter, James, and John got to spend Sabbath time listening to Jesus and basking in the light of his glory. What do you think? During that quiet time with Jesus, were they graced with a blessed seven year old state like that of Rosie? When they looked upon his beaming face, were their fears relieved and did all anxieties fade just like we sing each week in our hymn of assurance? 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of this world will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.' Did they have an inner peace of mind which they wished would last forever? Little by slow were they internalizing Jesus' teachings on righting the wrongs of injustice? Were their wounds being healed by the Holy One's gifts of acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness? Were their faint hearts being empowered by the Almighty's Love for them?

On the day after their Sabbath time with Jesus, those calm, 'at one with the universe' courageous disciples made the easy

descent down the mountain, only to fall fat on their faces when they tried to help out a possessed boy. In the story, Jesus attributes their failure to perverseness and a lack of faith. I never had a clue about what Jesus might have meant by this until I read a prayer by Walter Brueggemann which he composed and prayed with his seminary students at the end of one of his Old Testament classes. It's a prayer of petition and is entitled, 'Move Off The Page.'

'Move off the Page'

For a week now we have been cast in the role of readers, students, scholars, doctors. A week in the leisure class: air conditioning, many books, assured food, free time with only a modicum of anxiety. In our leisure, we have watched you move from verse to verse, noticed the force of your verbs, pondered your elliptical textual pauses, And now we dare interrupt your anticipated Sabbath with one imperative, for a moment, not scholars but petitioners in urgency. So listen up! You, majestic sovereign . . . move off the page! Move off the page to the world, move off the page to the trouble, move out of your paged leisure to the turmoil of your creatures. Move to the peace negotiations, and cancer diagnoses, and burning churches, and lynched blacks, and abused children. Listen to the groans and moans, and see and hear and know and remember, and come down! Have no Sabbath rest until your creatures rest well, all of us. Be your Friday self that your world may be Eastered. Move off the page! Amen.

I wonder: Did the disciples fail to cast out the demon from the boy because they were working from their own greatness rather than the greatness of their Sovereign God? No surprise then, that Luke's gospel story ends on a victorious note for Jesus. He not only cast the demon out of the boy but did so in a way that pointed to the greatness of God, not himself . . . doing the ego-sacrificial move of his Good Friday self. Important to note here in the rebuking of the demon, is that Jesus did not do the world's perverse thing of demonizing the child, rather he joined with the healing Spirit that did the compassionate work of just rebuking all things from the boy that were spiritually unclean.

Last Monday a crowd of 81 stressed out souls gathered in our fellowship hall to address our town problem of sludge that is being used by one of our farmers in West Bridgewater. Conservation Agent, John DeLano, did a wonderful job of bringing to public awareness the multitude of complex issues in our common dilemma. After his presentation everyone had a chance to speak. Individuals raised up issues of health and the well-being of our neighbors, land, and water. A challenge to MA DEP acceptable standards for approved Type I Sludge was made. Reports were given about the lack of support and action at both the town and state levels. Many gave testimony about the improper application of the sludge as mandated by state regulations. Some wondered whether or not the farmer's use of the sludge was in violation of Federal Clean Water Act Regulations. Others posed the question: Is the farmer's sludge waste recycling business in violation of the agreement that our town made with him to preserve the land for agricultural purposes?

The energy level for finding a solution to our 'stinky' problem was so high that, after the meeting was over, many stayed to network and talk about next steps. So, what do you think? Was the abundance of positive energy due to the fact that most folks did not waste any time doing the negative work of demonizing either the farmer or state/town officials who have failed us? And, could the fact that we opened with this prayer have made a difference?

Eternal Source of all that is, has been and yet will be:
all time and space is made holy in your Infinite Love.

Amid the ebb and flow of the ages, only You abide unchanged.

May we find the courage to embrace our common call
to be your compassion and light for those afflicted by
chronic intolerance and inhumanity.

May our speech and actions reveal your Saving Presence beyond the
boundaries of race, religious diversity, or the realms of politics.
Strengthen us to be your Listening Heart and your Prophetic Voice
for the healing of our common humanity and your earth. Amen.