

Better Angels - Higher Ground

Transfiguration Sunday

February 27, 2022

Luke 9:28-36

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. *29* And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. *30* Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. *31* They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. *32* 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. *33* 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. *34* While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. *35* Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” *36* 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.

They didn't recognize him, the disciples couldn't comprehend what they were seeing Jesus was different, more than what they'd thought. This man of the people, this healer, teacher, prophet Messiah, who had just been talking to them was now conversing with the faith's founder, Abraham, and prophet, Elijah and shining with holy light. They realized in that instant, who he was, that he was the Lord, the bearer of the likeness of God through whom the love of God was manifest. Have you had a revelation such as this? When something you hear or see, has you say, *yes, Jesus is the Messiah, His is the one in whom God's love is manifest.* Perhaps on Christmas Eve when you raise your candle or on the most ordinary of Sundays, like this we hear “This is my beloved son, listen to him” and something within us says, “I will” Yes, I will listen, I will follow. I will be the disciple, I'm invited to be, and we'd like to stay in that yes. That assurance, that peace within ourselves that sense of holiness in our own being.

So would the disciples, but Jesus leads them back down the mountain. Into the unsettled and unsettling world full of ego and conflict where the differences among us, so unimportant on top of that mountain become profoundly so. But they must follow him there, for he would have them bear the gift of revelation within themselves. And then open their eyes to the holiness that is around them and within them. Even in this blessed and warring world, even in one another.

I've been working on a thousand-piece Puzzle – it's of this painting *Starry Night* by Vincent Van Gogh. When I saw the original I stood so close as to see the places where the paint was raised off the page. And the guard asked me to step back. But not before I sensed the humanity behind these strokes. I'm currently working on a thousand-piece puzzle version and can get as close as I like. Each piece has by my count at least a dozen strokes of various colors of paint, layer upon layer, so many shades of blue and also yellow, browns and reds, and black and white.

I begin to see the human behind them. Multilayered, complex, the strokes of his life's experience, full of darkness and light. This person, this preacher's son, a man of faith who struggled so, and yet carried a revelation of the divine. And a sense of it around him, and so brought forth these revelations. Of its presence of the holly in a field of sunflowers. On a starry night over the village where he lived. In the face of the people with whom he lived.

How shall we see holiness? In weary and warring world might each person, in their breathtaking complexity have something to reveal to us. I've been reading a book about Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglas, an enslaved man who had freed himself, gone north, and was working for the rights of black soldiers in the Union Army. In 1863, one could stand in line outside the White House and wait for an audience with the President. And when he was invited in to meet Mr. Lincoln they were, to one another, a revelation. Lincoln was moved by Douglas' dignity, eloquence, intelligence, and forcefulness of conviction. Douglas was impressed by Lincolns honesty and modesty and readiness to call himself out, and to listen to a man of different station as his equal.

The layers of their life experience vastly different, one knew the stroke of a master's whip, the other studied law by candlelight, yet there was true meeting, there. They spoke their truths without hesitation or worry of offense, Lincoln would thereafter ask for Douglas' advice, Douglas thereafter, claimed this white man was truly his President. Two years before, in his first inaugural address Lincoln had called forth from the nation, the better angels of our nature, to engage one another out of our more noble selves. To see one another, perhaps, as God sees us. Right here, right now, in the thick of it, to be who the revelation of divine love; invites us to be, to carry the revelation from that higher ground, into the word.

It is still the call, how shall we rise up to become our better angels? Less weighed down by prejudice toward one another more able to see, as the disciples saw, the holiness before us? This week we ask, what might be a better way than war. I have been impressed by what I have learned about a project called the Braver Angels and learned that Sandy Freer has been studying this herself. I've invited Sandy to share what she's been learning. This is God's beloved daughter, let's listen.