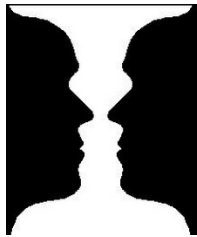


This morning is the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany – the season of the revelation of Christ – this coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday when we start to prepare for the bittersweet events of Holy Week and the great mystery of Easter. Since the date of Easter Sunday varies from year to year depending upon the moon, the number of Sundays in Epiphany also varies from year to year. But two of those Sundays always have the same readings; the first Sunday in Epiphany we remember Jesus' baptism, and the last Sunday, today, when we recall the Transfiguration. They are like bookends to the season, and they both include a voice from heaven. At Jesus' Baptism we hear, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," and today at the Transfiguration, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

At Jesus' baptism we see his humanity in his decision to get baptized even though he had no need to do so; in his transfiguration we see his God nature as he is briefly transfigured and the disciples see him shining with God's glory. There's a little foreshadowing in here of Jesus' passion. The disciples are fighting sleep in order to see Jesus shining with light as he prays and in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus is once again praying, the disciples don't manage to stay awake. And of course, here they see him with two men and Jesus is crucified between two men.

Transfiguration and Crucifixion – two very different events but deeply connected. Jesus is killed in an ignominious way and yet it is also his moment of greatest glory as in so doing he enables God to show the complete victory over the sin matrix which enmeshes us. We have a tendency to shy away from thinking about the cross, preferring to focus on Christ's glorious resurrection and the new life he brings. This is a correction from previous generations who have tended to focus on sin and the necessity of Christ's pain and suffering on our behalf. But I sometimes wonder whether we, and I speak for myself here, haven't gone too far in the direction of joy and have lost something of the depth of the wonder that is the mystery of the cross.



I'm sure you're all familiar with this optical illusion, known as Rubin's vase. If you look at it one way you see one thing; if you shift your perception you see another.

The transfiguration is a shift in perception. The disciples were able, in that limbic half awake, half asleep state of consciousness, to see Jesus as the Christ – the anointed one. They were able to see his light body shining brilliantly. The pain of the cross, the glory of the resurrection – you can't have one without the other. Which one you focus on is a shift of perception. The dark part of the image or the bright part of the image? If there were no dark there would be no contrast and we could not see the light. If there were no light we could not see the dark.

Sometimes we get stuck in the darkness of the world and of our lives. We don't see the light. It takes a shift in perception. I wonder how it would be if I saw everyone in this room or everyone in the market as the Christ? How would it be if I could see the oneness that we all share with all created life? How would I act differently if I could actually see that Christ light shining in the world?

We tend to think that everything in the wider world is going to hell in a handbasket. We see the news of war and refugee crises and hunger and disease, not to mention severe weather and water shortages. It all looks pretty bad. But this week, the Christian Science Monitor has a feature article explaining that

worldwide less people are living in poverty.¹ Between 1993 and 2012 the number of people living in extreme poverty was cut in half. There has been an unprecedented reduction in poverty and an improvement in health. A shift in perception takes us from the daily diet of disaster to see that human flourishing is increasing.

Yesterday a few people gathered here at St Ben's to make quilts to send to those who are dispossessed; refugees and the victims of natural disaster who will welcome a quilt made with love as a gift from friends across the world. We are adding to the numbers of those who are improving human flourishing.

Yet earlier this week I came across a quote from Dr. King about the parable of the good Samaritan.

“On the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”²

This is a change in perception. Instead of just thinking about how we can help those in need by supplying their needs with food or quilts or contributions towards housing, we are to change the way we look at it, taking more of a bird's eye view to see how the whole situation could be changed so that there are no more hungry people, no more cold people, no more homeless people. As King says, “we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway.” That is the reign of heaven on heaven.

By a shift in perception we can see the darkness of the world as an opportunity for us to see God's love at work, and be God's love at work. Instead of seeing gloom and doom we can see a wonderful opportunity for God's grace. We are not Polyannas who always look on the bright side and ignore the darkness but the people of God who can see the darkness but are not swallowed by it. Because we see God's light shining in the person of Christ so we are inspired to see that same light shining out of the people around us, God's beloved.

The writer and teacher, Marianne Williamson, tells of a time when she was complaining to God about a man she didn't like. After she had complained bitterly she heard God reply, “Huh, that's funny, I really like him.” Every individual including you and me and the leaders of ISIS are God's beloved, and the whole of creation is God's beloved.

Let us ask God to let us see with his eyes, the eyes of compassion and unconditional love; and the eyes of truth.

¹ Steven Radelet, “The War against Global Poverty” Christian Science Monitor, February 8, 2015

² “A Time to Break Silence,” at Riverside Church

