

## The Language of Love

[Exodus 24:12-18](#)

[Matthew 17:1-9](#)

We start every Epiphany the same way, and end it the same way. After the story of the Magi arriving in Jerusalem looking for Jesus, on the first Sunday of Epiphany we reflect on the Baptism of Jesus and on the last Sunday of Epiphany, like today, we hear about the Transfiguration. In between, we have readings which focus on who Jesus is, the beloved Son of God.

Some stories and some symbols have particular importance, and carry many layers of meaning for us. We could say they have a surplus of meaning. One of those is the metaphor of Jesus as the Lamb of God which I reflected on a few weeks ago. The Transfiguration is another.

We can see it as

- An opportunity for the disciples to see that Jesus is the Christ, reflecting God's glory
- An initiation for the Christ, along with incarnation, baptism, resurrection and ascension
- Showing the continuity of Jesus' ministry with that of the law - Moses and the prophets – Elijah
- Indicating that we too can be transformed by God's light

Are there others?

I invite you to spend just a couple of minutes reflecting with your neighbor about how you understand the transfiguration this morning...

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My reflection has been on Jesus' words that we discussed a couple of weeks ago – that he had come to fulfil the law and the prophets, and now

here he is in this remarkable vision with representatives of the law and the prophets. I suggested to you then that the Law and the Prophets – most of what makes up our Old Testament - was about the same message that Jesus taught and Jesus embodied; that keeping the Law is actually not about keeping to a set of regulations, but about showing one’s love for God.

I think that’s what Jesus means when he summarizes the law as “love God with all you’ve got, and your neighbor as yourself.”

Ten years ago, Gary Chapman came out with a book [The Five Love Languages](#). This was originally intended as a book about Christian marriage but its ideas have found their way into popular culture. I find the idea of loving God rather nebulous and tend to worry about whether I really love God since I’m not feeling warm fuzzies every time I say “God.” So it’s helpful to me to name different ways we can show love.

Here are the five love languages:

- Words of Affirmation
- Acts of service
- Gifts
- Quality Time
- Physical Touch

OK, so the last one, physical touch, does not apply to God as we know God at this time. But the other four are all important ways that we show our love for God, and they are all embedded in the Law and the Prophets.

When we worship, we offer God “words of affirmation.” God does not need to be praised like a small child, but offering God our praise in hymn and in prayer opens our hearts to the love flowing through the universe. When we contribute our time and energy to the furtherance of God’s kin-dom whether inside or outside the church, we are loving God through acts of service; when we make an offering, whether of money or

of casseroles we are loving God with our gifts; and whenever we spend time in prayer, meditation or just being in God's presence we show our love through quality time.

Prior to Jesus, the people of Israel showed their love for God in these ways just as we do.

But Jesus brings a totally different possibility into the mix.

Jesus brings the possibility of transformation. Jesus brings the possibility of being transformed into Christ-like beings. Jesus offers us a completely new heart. He offers not just the languages of love but Love itself.

On the mountain, the disciples were not afraid when they saw Moses and Elijah, not even when Jesus started shining like the sun; it was when they heard God's voice that they were afraid. But the words were words of love, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" and Jesus followed them with loving words of his own, "Get up and do not be afraid."

God's love transforms. When we open ourselves to the possibility of a mutual relationship with God, we are probably right to have a little concern. Showing God our love is fairly safe – we know how to do these things – but allowing ourselves to be transformed by God's love is a different thing.

I know that I get caught up in all the ways I communicate my love for God – acts of service, words of affirmation, gifts and, sometimes, quality time... I get busy showing my love for God and neighbor... It is much easier than being consumed, being transformed, transfigured by love.

What did we hear in the first reading? "Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty

nights.” I would rather rush around doing important things than dare to spend a long long time in the presence of the devouring fire of God’s love. It’s not surprising that when Moses came down from that mountain his face was shining so brightly that he had to wear a face covering so people could look at him.

yet remember Thomas Merton’s vision – he described it like this,

“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.”

We are all walking around, shining like the sun – already. The transformation is not that we suddenly move from someplace else into the heart of Love but that we realize, that’s where we have been all along. We are already surrounded and filled and embraced by Love herself, by the God of Jesus who always says, “do not be afraid”. It is when we allow that reality to be the reality of our lives that we are transformed and even transfigured.

My friends, we may show God our love through our different love languages but God just wants to fill us with the self-giving Love that

makes the atoms dance, the self-giving Love that consumes and transforms entirely, the Love that transforms us into the Christ himself.

I am going to end with the story from the Desert Fathers that continues to speak to me:

Abba Lot went to Abba Joseph and said to him, “Abba, insofar as I can, I say my prayers, I keep my little fast, and I pray and meditate and practice contemplative silence, and insofar as I can I purify myself of distracting thoughts. Now what more shall I do?”

The elder stood up and stretched his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire, and he said to him, “Why not become entirely fire?”