

“Light from Light”

I am in a quandary. I have two topics I want to talk about today and one that I do not. The problem, of course, is that the thing I do not want to talk about is what is crying out to be discussed. My three topics are baptism, transfiguration, and you might have guessed that the thing I do not want to talk about is the war in Ukraine. I would rather that this war had not happened. I would rather that we not have to deal with truly evil people like those autocrats and oligarchs that dominate Russian government right now. We must speak about the problem of evil or we are denying the reality of life. Jesus did not deny evil so neither can we.

The problem of evil is one that has vexed theologians for millennia. We won't solve it this morning. Atheists say that the mere existence of evil is proof that a loving, omnipotent God does not exist. To me that is as trite as saying that God is loving and omnipotent and we just don't understand that what is evil in our eyes is not evil in God's eyes. The former is simplistic and dualistic, that is to say that the world and our existence is black or white when we know that much of life is on the gray scale. The latter makes God out to be mean and not worthy of our worship.

It seems to me that the gift of free will like most gifts can be misused. The challenge for most of us is to not give in to the forces that darken our hearts. By learning what those forces are that wall us off from God we can learn to recognize them in others and in the world. As we become wiser we learn how to find the light, cherish the light and live into the light. As it is written in the prologue to the Gospel of John “the light came into the world and the darkness could not overcome it.” We know this is true because for much of recorded history we have contended with evil and yet we see that goodness, love, charity, hope, and justice live on. As Dr. King said, “the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”¹

That does not mean that we give in to the evil. Rather, we like Jesus are to become transfigured. We are to go up the mountain of faith and encounter the one God who will transform our hearts. But we are not to stay up on the mountain top. It may be blissful to glow in the light of God's love as Jesus, Moses and Elijah did, but we have to come down the mountain and deal with the reality on the ground. Perhaps we have to deal with fearful people making idols as Moses did. Maybe we must deal with a wretched King and Queen who subjugate the people and lead them away from God as Elijah did. Possibly we have to confront the powers of empire, injustice, and poverty as Jesus did. Despite the fact that every one of these men died without seeing the absolute fulfillment of their ministry, they forged ahead knowing that God was with them. Never forget that our parish is named Emmanuel—God with us.

¹ “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution.” Given at Washington National Cathedral, March 31, 1968. Five days before his assassination on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, TN.

As children of God we are called to be transfigured and transformed on our mountain tops and bring that transfigured self as Jesus did into the world. Today we get to experience the transfiguration of a child of God in the act of baptism of James Merrill Anderson. The Church says that sacraments are outward signs of an inward grace. That is that the act of baptism is for our eyes to see, but what is going on is inside the heart. Today Alina and John have brought their son and Lily has brought her brother to take part in that outward sign; something we will do with great formality in just a few minutes. They have brought him because they want the world to see what they have seen in their little boy. That is that he is full of God's grace and growing more and more into that grace-filled life each day.

I have seen it in James in the months that he has been here. Each week he comes to the altar rail with his family and receives a blessing. I look into his face and there is this sense of awe and peace as I lay my hand upon his head and say the words of blessing. His eyes are wide open as if he is seeing something that we cannot see. He is actively engaging in the mystery of God's love for him.

Perhaps today we will be blessed enough to see his transfiguration. Whether we see him transfigured before our eyes is not important because James will experience it. As he grows older he may forget and that is where we come in. It is our job in supporting him in his life in Christ to remind him of the beauty and wonder of this day. It is our job to help him remember that he is God's beloved and God is well pleased with him today and every day of his life.

He will have days when he doubts his belovedness just as some may doubt the existence of God because of the presence of evil. Doubts are normal. It is also normal to have a loving group of people who support us through those doubts. When it comes time to answer the question "Will you support this person in his life in Christ?" our answer will be a full-throated "We will" that will live in his heart forever.

James you are beloved. Shine into the world with the love and grace God has bestowed upon you. The world needs to be transfigured. It is when each of us lets the grace of God shine through that we push the darkness aside and can live into the light of Christ for ourselves and for all who so desperately need to see than light shine on.