

February 3, 2008

Transfiguration - Last Epiphany A

Exodus 24:12-18

¹²God said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” ¹³So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴To the elders he had said, “Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.” ¹⁵Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of God settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day God called to Moses out of the cloud. ¹⁷Now the appearance of the glory of God was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people. ¹⁸Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, “It is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Child, the Beloved;

with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Human One has been raised from the dead.”

Let us pray.....

This is Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before the beginning of Lent. Our liturgical year is developing very rapidly this year. The number of days between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday are the fewest in our life time. This is the result of the overlaying of two calendars: the Solar Calendar of 365 days which is our common calendar of 12 months, and the Lunar Calendar which in Jewish tradition determined feast days and by which the date of Easter is determined.

Each year our liturgical calendar is structured so that we tell our sacred story:

1. Beginning with Advent – a time of anticipation and expectation, preparation for the Birth of Jesus
2. Culminating in Christmas and Epiphany
3. Followed by the Baptism of Jesus and Jesus’ ministry in Galilee.
4. Culminating in the Transfiguration
5. Followed by Lent – a time of intentional spiritual discipline in preparation for Holy Week and Jesus’ confrontation

with the Imperial system of domination resulting in Jesus' capture, torture and execution

6. Culminating in Easter the celebration that death could not destroy the life and ministry of Jesus.
7. Leading to Pentecost and the Spirit of God empowering the Kin-dom of God movement to continue in history, giving birth to the community we call the church.

Today we are celebration Transfiguration Sunday, the mid point in our sacred story.

In many cultures one of the roles of the priest or shaman is to be the keeper of the calendars. In an agricultural or nomadic society the very survival of the community depended upon the successful integration of community into the cycles of nature. Knowing when to prepare the soil, when to plant, when to harvest, when to move the flocks out of the flood plains, were essential to the well being of the community. Since our mother earth is a part of an inter-connected universe in which each part affects all other parts and we are a part of our mother earth, we can only understand and live properly if we understand our relationships with the other parts of creation.

In Mayan Cultural the priest, the "Hak Yek", is the "Day Keeper" – the one who counts the days in three different but inter-connected calendars: The lunar calendar, the solar calendar and a calendar based on relationship between the earth and the planets.

In industrial society the connection between calendar, the rhythms of community life and our place in creation became more and more disconnected and today in our post-modern,

post-industrial society these connections have been completely lost. Our calendars are merely a linear list of days used to plan our tasks and activities with no connection to creation.

Our liturgical calendars have also lost their connection to our place in creation and been appropriated by the idol of the Market to tell us when and what to buy as our identities have been reduced and distorted into individual isolated consumers. Our children can readily identify thousands of corporate brand logos but can not name a dozen species of plants and animals in their local environment upon which their very survival depends.

I invite us to try to find ways to use our calendars in new ways, to transform our calendars from linear list of tasks, into tools to help us pay attention to the world around us and our connections to creation.

Rather than buying a new “planner” to help us fit more stuff into our days and to manage more “efficiently” our time so that we can do more stuff...How might we use our calendars to pay more attention to each other and to creation?

How does our counting of days help us to find our place in the community of creation?

How does our counting of days help us to become more fully who God is calling us to be?

How does our counting of days help us to know the divine more deeply?

How does our counting of days help us to become more Christ like?

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Our sacred Story, as Followers of Jesus, was developed out of a conversation with the sacred story of Jesus' community – the sacred story of Hebrew or Jewish people – the sacred story contained in the Books of Moses and the Prophets.

The Jesus Movement was a Jewish renewal movement that made the claim that the way to be faithful Jews, the way to be faithful to God, to fulfill the Law and the Prophets was to follow the Way of Jesus.

In the story of the Transfiguration the Jesus Movement is dramatically making this claim. Moses, representing the Law and Elijah, representing the Prophets, appear on the mountain with Jesus and out of the cloud comes the voice of God saying, "This is my Child, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Over the last 2000 years the followers of Jesus have continued to try to be in conversation with the Law and the Prophets. Our lectionary calendar over lays our annual telling of the Christian sacred story with a three year cycle of reading the Law and the Prophets. Each Sunday we have a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures either from one of the five books of Moses or one of the Prophets which we repeat every three years.

The hope is that by keeping these overlapping calendars that have us re-tell the sacred story of the Way of Jesus in conversation with story of the Moses and the Prophets, we

will be able to more clearly read the signs of our times so that we can be faithful to God and stay on the path, walking with the divine and all those who have gone before us and with creation itself towards the fullness of the Kin-dom of God...So that we can be the body of Christ in history.

Too often the Church has failed in this. We have told the stories not to seek God but to justify our idolatry of wealth and power. Since Constantine, too often the church and our sacred stories have been co-opted by systems of domination, by imperial projects of conquest and subjugation.

We must keep our calendars and tell our stories with the humility to allow the prophetic voice to bring a self-criticism to both our personal lives and to our social systems.

Three of the signs of the times that we at Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ have identified as crucial for understanding who God is calling us to be and what God is calling us to do in this time and place are:

1. The environmental Crisis: global warming, the consumption of the resources of our mother earth at a rate that will destroy her and us.
2. Migration: more of the human family has been displaced from their land and homes than at any other time in history. This is a result of human actions and decisions: war, trade policy and environmental degradation. Millions of those displaced persons are arriving in the USA and in our communities. How will we respond?
3. War and militarism: The illegal and immoral war in Iraq is the most dramatic example of the endemic and systemic

violence of our society and our nation's false believe in the myth of redemptive violence.

As a community we have established a Greening Task Force to help us as a community of faith understand and address the environmental Crisis.

We have established a Immigration and New Sanctuary Task Force to help us understand and address the migration crisis.

We have many members and organizational partners that have been for many years been helping us understand and address the issues of War and militarism.

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As we prepare to enter the next chapter of telling and remembering our sacred story, the 40 days of Lent, I invite us all to pay more attention to our counting of the days.

Let us pay closer attention each and every day of Lent, to our place in the community of creation, to our place in the human family and how we participate and collaborate in the killing and displacement of millions of our sisters and brothers.

What might we do each and every day for the 40 days of Lent that would remind us of our inter-connectedness in the web of creation and what might we do each and every day for the 40 days of Lent to begin to restore right relationships with the web of creation?

The daily reminder might be a daily discipline of prayer, reading of scripture, or fasting. The national United Church of Christ has prepared a daily devotional on-line. You can go to

the UCC web sight and subscribe and they will send you a daily devotional by email each day during lent.

As a daily discipline to begin the restoration of right relationships you might decide to eliminate one trip in your car every day and walk or take public transportation.

Join an affinity group to plan and participate in the Day of Resistance to the War in Iraq on Maundy Thursday.

What will you do each day during Lent to pay attention to the web of creation? To ear the cry of the suffering planet and our sisters and brothers? To ear God's gracious invitation to turn away from the project of death and joyously participate in the project of life?

As you discern what your spiritual practices will be during Lent, be creative. Hold the tension between pushing yourself and being realistic about what you can do. Bring your ideas with you to our Ash Wednesday service and to worship next week, the first Sunday of Lent. With the input from the Greening Task Force and the New Sanctuary Task Force the Worship Committee is developing a list of suggestions for Lenten disciplines that will be posted on our web sight and shared with you next Sunday in the bulletin.

What ever it is, let each of us use the counting of the days during Lent to help us become more fully who God is calling us to be, to know the divine more deeply.