

Transfigured

Transfiguration Yr B February 14, 2021 Mark 9:2-9

Jesus takes three of the disciples Peter, James, and John with him and they head up a mountain. That in and of itself is not unusual or unexpected. We we read in other parts of the gospels that Jesus often takes disciples aside to talk with them, teach them, or even pray with them. But when they head up that mountain the story of the transfiguration becomes unique.

Mark says “Jesus was transfigured before them and his clothes were dazzling white” and in case we didn’t click in that something extraordinary is happening he adds “such as no one on earth could bleach them.” And then Elijah and Moses appear and talk with Jesus. And the disciples, Peter, James and John, stand in awe.

During African Heritage month the stories and achievements of people of African descent are lifted up for us to hear and celebrate. Stories like that of William Hall from Horton's Bluff who served as Able Seaman on board HMS Rodney during the Crimean War and was the first black person, the first Nova Scotian, and the first Canadian sailor to receive the Victoria Cross. Or stories like Rose Fortune an entrepreneur at Annapolis Royal in the 1840's who was also Canada’s first woman police officer and known for her strength of character and courage.

William Hall and Rose Fortune are but two of the African Nova Scotians who overcame obstacles and challenges and made a tremendous impact on their communities. When we hear of their lives, their actions, the difference they made we are amazed, surprised, and hopefully inspired. And because of what they achieved and what they did, as we hear their stories we stand awe of them.

The disciples know exactly who Moses and Elijah are- they are two of the towering figures in their history. Moses is the liberator, the lawgiver, the one who brought the people from slavery to freedom. And Elijah is the voice of God in a time when the people had turned from God to false idols. Both Moses and Elijah are respected and revered because they made a difference in their lives. They are role models, examples of faith, and they are witnesses to the great things God can do in the lives of ordinary everyday people.

The disciples know their stories and they stand in awe of the great figures and most likely in amazement of what is happening in front of them. And then Peter say to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” And before we dismiss his words the truth is that

it is good for Peter, James and John to be there. Just imagine.

Peter, James and John are witnessing something incredible and remarkable and they are standing in the midst of greatness. And so it's no surprise that they want to stay there, build dwellings or depending on how you want to read the Greek build altars for these great figures. But that is actually why the gospel says "He did not know what to say, for they were terrified."

An image often used in African Heritage Month is on the front of our bulletin this morning. Sankofa is a word from Ghana associated with the image of a bird carrying an egg looking back. The image and word comes from a saying which basically means "It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten." A reminder that we need to stop on occasion and look where we have been in order to make sure we have not left something precious behind. A reminder that in our lives we need to take time to look back at the rich and important parts of our history that we often overlook. And I say our history deliberately.

The theme for this years African heritage month is Black history matters: listen, learn, share and act. Because this month as we hear stories of people of African descent who did great things, we need to remember that these are people from within our province, our country, and our world. Yes, many of them lived in a different time which was very different from ours but the truth is that often makes their achievements and stories that much more amazing.

For people like William Hall and Rose Fortune did great things, they opened doors and changed the world, amidst rampant racism, discrimination, and with so much working against them. Listening to their stories it is easy to be in awe, amazed, and honestly a bit intimidated by how much they did in their lives. And it would be easy to put them on pedestals and try to immortalize their stories as impossible feats.

Which misses the point just as Peter wanting to stay on the mountain with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah does. The stories that amaze and inspire us from our history are stories of people like you and me who lived extraordinary lives and did remarkable things. They are sons and daughters, sisters and brothers who used what God gave them to change the world for the better. And their example stands as a witness to the fact that we can change the world as well.

Because when we look back to find what has been forgotten like Sankofa reminds us it is not so that we can simply know what happened for the sake of knowing but so that we can learn from those stories. So that we bring forward from the past lessons and inspiration to make a difference today and create a better future.

After Peter says it would be good to stay here a cloud overshadows them and tells them "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" And when things clear it is only Jesus standing with them. And Jesus takes Peter, James, and John down the mountain to continue serving and sharing the good news of God.

As well as listen and learn the theme for this African heritage month also reminds us to share and act. Because the value of history is in knowing what happened and understanding the impact and difference people can make. The importance of history is how it helps us understand our present world. So that we know the history behind us and allow that to inspire, direct, and face the challenges of today. So that we hear the stories of discrimination and racism and recognize how those things still happen in our world. So that we hear of people changing minds and hearts and making opportunities for others and realize that we can do the same in our lives. So that we understand that our efforts, our actions, our voices, our faith can make a difference now and for generations to come.

For Jesus leads us into the world. So we can take our gifts, our skills, our abilities and share the good news of God. Sometimes that will mean touching the lives of those closest to us, or students we teach, or neighbors we help, or transforming the way things work in our institutions or society. Sometimes it will mean laying the foundation for those who come after to build something even greater. But no matter what form it takes Jesus leads us as people of faith to shine in this world with the light of grace, the light of love, the light of God.

For we, you and I, are called to live as people of faith in this world. Looking back at the stories of those who came before us and bringing forward what we need to make today better. Aware of the wonders that God can work in our lives and in our world. Because we have heard the witness of those who came before us who rose and faced their struggles, and we know that Jesus calls us and leads us to do no less in our lives and in our world.