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Lord God, we continue to confess our own need of you — you who come to love us, heal us, and make us whole. Hear our simple prayers. Change us from broken, earthbound creatures to proclaimers of your heavenly glory and power. Give us voices to pray and sing, ears to hear your truth and wisdom, all in the name of Jesus the Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

This morning, we encounter two dramatic instances of God interacting with humanity in amazing ways. Moses interacts with God and as a result, he comes down from the mountain, his face shining brightly and apparently is permanent. Then in our gospel reading, while Jesus was praying to God up on the mountain, his face suddenly changes, and his clothes become dazzling white.

Both instances came as a result of an intimate encounter with God. In both instances, the Israelites and the three apostles did not know what to do with this and were terrified. It this wasn't enough, Peter, James and John witness Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus. Just as they were leaving Jesus, Peter jumps up and offers to build three tents or dwellings. WHY? Was it because he thought that Moses and Elijah were physically present and needed a place to rest or that they were here to stay? We don't know.

The most common perception seems to be that Peter wanted to construct booths for Elijah, Moses, and Jesus so that he could prolong the glorious event that he was witnessing. Can't really blame him. It, certainly, had to be an unexpected spectacle and an amazing turn of events, especially since Jesus had just told the disciples a week earlier that he was going to die. We do not know what Peter was thinking, but we **are told** that Peter did not know what he was saying. Then God spoke, just as God spoke at the Baptism of Jesus and to Moses many years before. When you hear the voice of God, things can never be the same. When we truly encounter Jesus, our lives **cannot** remain unchanged.

I think that intuitively, we know this to be true. But following Jesus can be a little frightening. Jesus calls us out of our comfort zones. He did it to the apostles and he does it to us. There is a new educational program put out by the Episcopal Church called "How2charist". It is an annotated video with a 28-page discussion guide for learning why Episcopalians do what they do when they celebrate the Eucharist. It looks like an excellent program and part of what struck me was the introduction, by the Rev. Callie Swanlund. She states: "Several years ago, I visited an aquarium...with a big round tank. And in that tank, all of the fish, hundreds of them, just swam around in a circle all day. Except that the day that I was there, one fish started swimming in the opposite direction. And as I watched, a few more followed, and a few more, until there was this entire subsection of the fish going against the grain. I talked to a docent, at the aquarium who had been there for 30 years and he said; "they always go in the same direction. I have never seen a fish swim in the opposite direction. And I thought about Jesus. And how Jesus came into this world and went against the grain. At first it was just him. He picked up a few followers and he picked up a few more, until there was an entire subsection of people, going against the grain. Jesus came and turned the world upside down. He challenged us to open our hearts to love more radically than we had ever loved before. It is not always an easy task. Often times it feels that we are living upstream. But there is often a lot to be gained by doing things differently. By turning this world on its head."

What a great insight. Jesus never sat back and had folks brought to him. He went out and found them. Where he found hypocrisy, he literally turned things upside down and upset the applecart, so to speak. There is no doubt that Jesus is the Light of the World. That is very important, and we often picture Jesus as the light at the end of the tunnel. But if you think about it, looking through a dark tunnel to a distant light can still be a frightening journey. It is still dark. This concept puts Jesus on a pedestal patiently waiting for us to find our way to him. I believe that just as Jesus actively sought out the apostles, He also actively seeks us out and expects something from us in return. Yes, He is the light of the world, and in him **we are lights to the world.**

The church is not called to invite people out of the darkness into the light so much as to bring the light into the darkness. It seems like a small difference but has a lot of implications. Sometimes we spend so much time building our booths, our own safe houses - our church buildings and communities -- but fail to spend anywhere near that much time bringing the light of Christ into the dark tunnels. Often, we wait for people, who are lost in the darkness to somehow find their way towards us. That is not our role. The church is to take the light of truth, the gospel and glory of Jesus, boldly into the tunnel. There is always darkness lurking right outside our ring of light. Will we move forward and further into that darkness with the light of the gospel? If we are to light the darkness; we may need to create new windows, to allow the light of Christ to shine into the darkness.

One of the things that I had never considered before, is that many of the windows that we do have both philosophically and physically are constructed to keep the message of Jesus **out of the darkness**. Ever notice which way the beautiful stained-glass windows of our churches are directed? Most stained-glass windows only tell our stories to those already safely inside the illumined interior of the church community. I walked around St. Paul's in Lansing yesterday and noticed how dark the church actually was. The sanctuary was surrounded by very beautiful stained-glass windows.

To those trapped outside in the tunnel, our beautiful windows are nothing but hazy, multicolored blurs. Their beauty and messages only understandable by those who are already inside. The other thing to consider is that these windows also prevent us from seeing the world outside of these walls. I may have mentioned this to you before, but I have been to so many Episcopal churches who touted their stained-glass windows as one of their primary attributes. And yes, they are magnificent. Unfortunately, they block out everything outside and no one outside can see in. The last thing that we want to project is an invisible sign that sends the message, "For members only".

For those congregations who are in the city, I can only imagine just how uncomfortable it would feel to have nice large open windows that look out into the surrounding community knowing that those passing by were also able to look in on us. Of course, I am not just speaking about church windows, but also how we project the light of Christ to others outside these walls.

Yesterday, Joyce and I attended Vestry Days in Lansing. The theme for the day was; "Fire of Renewal; - Growing into the Body of Christ". We covered discerning and answering God's call to lead and strengthen our congregations and How are we doing with helping people to take the next steps on their spiritual journeys? We covered a lot of things yesterday but what it brought back to me on this Transfiguration Sunday was that Moses was permanently changed after he encountered God on the mountain. Peter, James, and John were changed forever after they encountered God and were witness to the incarnation of Jesus. When we encounter Jesus through our Baptisms, through the Holy Eucharist, through the love of the Body of Christ, **we must be changed, we are changed.**

What does that mean for each of us? How do we begin to share the light of Christ to those who sit in darkness? For Jan and I, we are beginning to reach out into the community. On Friday, we started our new ministry at the Share the Warmth Shelter. We are volunteering there on Friday mornings from 7:00 to 10:00. I am not wearing my collar, but I did wear my 'Episcopal Church Welcomes You' t-shirt. I also started volunteering at the Daily Bread Soup kitchen and again wear my t-shirts. I do wear my collar when I go to the Kiwanis meetings. Folks that I and we encounter know we attend Christ Episcopal Church. It is a start, but Jan and I need to be sure that we have enough of the light of Jesus in us, that is visible to others, so they can see the light in the darkness.

It is the same for each of us. Yes, Jesus is the light of the world. But we are the ones who need to carry that light into the darkness and to lead others to Jesus. Martin Luther King Jr once stated: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive

out hate: only love can do that. This is not something that we can do from the pews. We come here to worship God, to share strength with each other, to receive strength from the Body and Blood of Jesus. We come here to share our stories with each other and to find ways to share those stories with those who are not here on Sundays. But to do that, we need to know what our stories are.

Some questions that I would like you to think about as we enter this Lenten season are taking us back to the basics. And you don't have to share the answers with anyone unless you want to.

--What brought you to this church?

--What keeps you here?

--Think about a time that you felt God really alive in our church?

--What have you loved in this church and in our traditions?

--Think about a time when you shared your gifts, here or elsewhere. What did you do? What made that possible?

These questions are not just meant to create a feeling of nostalgia or to cause us all to think about how good things were many years ago. But will stir within us the deep love that we have in Jesus so we can then find ways to share that love with others and light their way out of the darkness. What a blessed day that will be.

AMEN!