

February 15, 2015, Transfiguration Sunday  
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church  
Mark 9:2-9

### Glimmers

Today is the last Sunday before Lent. It's a festival Sunday that includes bright songs of praise and a blazing reading from the gospel of Mark. It's a Sunday that concludes and culminates a season celebrating light, including the light at earth's beginning. Reflecting on that, I've been reflecting on a poem entitled "Creation<sup>1</sup>." This poem considers the unruly characteristics of creation, the immoderate, the intemperate, the incomplete aspects of this our created world, a world which often seems rough and ragged. This poem, "Creation," is not a poem that rhymes. It's a little hard to follow, and there are parts that I'm not sure about, but it includes a statement that stopped me in my tracks.

The poem begins: "Obvious of course, now and in the beginning: God is not a perfectionist. Good at detail for sure, and drama, but lacking the compulsion to get every piece of punctuation in its proper place ..... ever. And forever forgetting the finishing touches; a proper frame, that final proofreading." I wondered at this stanza. I wasn't sure, I thought, is that right? God is not a perfectionist? I do think there is something to this characterization of God as not compulsive, nor controlling—but careless?

The poem continues: "Tempting to be critical of such sloppiness, all those excesses and omissions." Again, I'm unsure about calling God sloppy... But it was the next line, the example and observation it makes, that got me: "For instance, surely there is too much sadness to go around, more than what's necessary for lessons and poetry."

That is right, I thought. Of that I am sure, we are sure: "There is too much sadness to go around, more than what's necessary for lessons and poetry." We who live in this world, who listen to the news, we who have siblings who will not speak to us, we who have godsons with cancer, we who are judged—or judge—by the color of skin rather than the content of character, we know this is right: "There is too much sadness to go around."

How do we have faith in such a world? When sadness, and sickness, and injustice, and outright evil seem unfairly apportioned if not overwhelming? When there seems too much darkness, and not enough light?

The gospel of Mark in some ways agrees, the gospel of Mark as a whole tells a pretty grim tale of human nature, and of human comprehension of divine nature. The gospel of Mark as a whole has a rather dark view of human awareness of divine presence and divine action. Most of the time, the characters in this gospel don't get it. But today's reading from Mark says that up on a mountaintop there is revelation, a piercing brightness. Jesus shines. Jesus' true glory is seen. Peter and others are there. Peter sees the glory, Peter feels awe and confusion, and then a voice from heaven speaks, "This is my Son, the Beloved!"

The story is riddled with strange detail, excesses and omissions, its experience includes terror and not knowing what to say, and it all sounds incomplete, unfinished, ending, as it does, with an order of secrecy on the journey down the mountain. And even as this story ends going down the mountain, this story sets us on another journey, up a mountain. This is the last Sunday before Lent, the season through which we journey up another mountain, called Calvary, a mountain where on a Friday called Good, the "too much sadness of the world" peaked.

How do we have faith in such a world, a world which metes out suffering so unfairly, so

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<sup>1</sup> "Creation" by Janeal Turnbull Ravndal, published in *The Christian Century*, October 1, 2014, Vol. 131, No. 20.

wildly, so widely?

This past fall my husband's cousin had a baby boy who was born with a heart abnormality. After anxious weeks of waiting, this infant just went through heart surgery. You can imagine the overwhelming emotions of that experience, the fear, the confusion, the questions, the unfairness. The baby's father, who just happens to be named Peter, wrote an email about it, an e-mail that was like a poem that stopped me in my tracks.

Peter said that amidst all the overwhelming emotion, even including the doubt and anger, "Why was his son was born with a hole in his heart?" amidst all of that, Peter said he experienced a piercing feeling of gratitude and blessing. Peter wrote that this gratitude and blessing was most keenly felt not in the joyously positive results of the surgery, but in the moments such as the phone calls, and the many notes; in the lunch delivered by his sister, with a hug; in the uncle who drove through the night to be there in the waiting room when the surgery was finished.

More than mere glimmers of hope, these experiences, these ways that other people are present and care, saying so even when they don't know what to say, these are the very light of Christ. When you are present to those around you, when you show you that you care, saying it in whatever words that you can, when you do that, the very light of Christ shines through you.

Christ's glorious light transfigures us too. God takes our wild and unruly human selves and makes us the beloved community of the Beloved Son, because God is not finished with us. God's total care and God's perfect love, is revealed in Jesus, in whom, and through whom, we are and still will be, a new creation.