

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 9:28-36
Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

February 27, 2022
The Last Sunday after Epiphany

Here's a little known fact about me...I do not like tunnels or caves. I especially don't like tunnels or caves underwater when I go diving. When it comes to these closed in, dark spaces, my one rule is simple...I will only go in, if and only if, I can see the way out. There must be at least some light at the end of the tunnel.

In darkness with no visible path forward I fear that I will get lost or that the walls will collapse. I imagine not being able to see or breath or move. It's so bad that I can't even watch a movie or TV show about people in caves...and don't ever make me watch a real story about someone who got trapped. Because not only am I terrified of getting trapped myself, I am terrified of having nightmares about being trapped.

I need the light. I need the way forward.

It's appropriate that today, we not only focus our hearts and minds on our annual meeting, but that we do so in the company of light. In our Gospel, Jesus is transfigured in front of Peter, James and John; filled with a light that was dazzling in their presence. The Apostle Paul refers to the light of transfiguration as a lifting of the veil, a removing of darkness that only Jesus can provide.

I love Paul's words in his letter to the church in Corinth. *"¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another...."*

In other words, we all need the light. We all need the way forward.

It's a perfect message for our annual meeting. It's a message I want you to consider as we look back at where we have been, the challenges we have faced, the joys we have encountered. And I want you to consider how the light of Christ has gotten us through this past year with a heart full of hope and conviction. And finally, I want you to consider how the light of Christ is transforming you and this church for the future.

When you see light in the midst of darkness, when you see light at the end of the tunnel it usually brings forth one central emotion. It brings forth hope, because you know that there is freedom from what has overshadowed you. There is freedom as you get closer and closer to the light in front of you. It's that hope that Paul wants us to focus on in Corinthians. It's the kind of hope that gives voice to our struggles and names our wounds. It's the kind of hope that rises

above adversity and puts aside our limitations. It's the kind of hope that builds strength out of weakness and faith out of doubt. It's the kind of hope that brings life out of death.

Now...here's the thing about those cracks of light that come into the darkness...you have to be willing to walk towards them...even if you can't initially see each step forward, even if you trip, even if you have to feel around for the walls to guide you. Paul points out that it is easy to keep our veils on, to shroud ourselves from the light if we are fearful of taking those first steps forward. At times, it's easier to stay in darkness than to take responsibility for the choices we have made, the shame we have held, the resentment we have harbored, the change we need to make.

But Paul says that it is only in taking the veil off, to encounter the light, that we can truly feel freedom and safety. It's only then that we can fully experience what it means to live into Christ's calling for our lives.

Luke wants us to look...look to the light and be willing to see. And once we see...be willing to transform our hearts and our minds.

So let me ask you this...how is the light of Christ working in and through you? How is it working in and through Grace Church?

There are two observations I want to share with you as a response. The first is that as a faith community, Grace has continued to move into the light during this extended time of COVID. We have never lost sight of the need to be together, to care for one another, to laugh together, to pray together. Although this time has been frustrating and we have had to adjust over and over again, the light that has shown forth here in this place is incredibly hopeful. You have shown time and time again how to embody the light of Christ in this community. For that, I am grateful and blessed beyond measure.

As a result, we kept worshipping together...outdoors when appropriate and indoors when safe. We worked to adjust how we gathered to make our time together safe for the most vulnerable. We reached to one another and took meals to one another. We found a safe way to share communion together. And even though we were able to re-gather in person, we continued to offer an online worship service for those who couldn't attend in person.

In short, we never let the light die out. Instead, we kept it strong.

Not only did we keep the light strong, we let it grow and expand. And in doing so, we built up the body of Christ. We welcomed our Deacon, Brian. We held a discernment group to get more people engaged with the life of Grace. We re-engaged our pastoral care efforts. And, we had our most successful stewardship campaign of the last decade.

We have created a stronger presence at the Diocesan level as I was asked to serve on the Executive Board and co-convene our new Virginia Plan for Covenantal Giving. And, I am

honored to now serve the Greater Goochland community as a chaplain for our Fire and Rescue Department. Our growth in ministry and outreach reminds me that our light doesn't just shine within these four walls but it shines out to so many people across our county and across our state.

So today, the question becomes...how do we keep the light of Christ growing? How do we make it bigger and stronger? The first answer is this...we need to be together. We need to keep re-engaging and making sure we aren't falling into patterns of habit. Being a community of faith means that we are not alone in this journey. If you are able, I encourage you to come back to church as often as you can. It's great that the light may be shining brightly in your home but as Christians, we are called to share that light with others. So, if you have fallen into patterns of ease by not getting up and out on Sunday morning or not re-engaging with others, I encourage you to take those first steps.

Here are some ways we are going to do that together...in the coming months we will be working to re-engage in our outreach ministries. We will create new fellowship opportunities for young adults and families. We will build Christian formation opportunities for children & youth. We will once again host gatherings for new members and visitors. We will re-establish our Community Prayer Service and we will strive to build future lay leaders for Grace.

That's what it means for us to step out of the darkness and uncertainty of these past two years and commit now to growing the light of Christ.

Sometimes, it takes a radical shift in our daily lives to help bring us back to the core values that we affirm through our faith. We are at one of these times. My prayer for this church and for our community is that we take this opportunity to draw closer to one another and to God; to heal divides; to create new relationships; to expand ways of loving and living as God's own.

I do not look at this time of COVID as a set-back. Instead, I look at it as a grace-filled time to come back to the things we love, to remember what life is about, and to tangibly feel love in action. We are so incredibly blessed to have this faith community to call our own. Let us never take for granted the gift it truly is to be followers of Jesus Christ, to be restorers of God's creation, and to be care-takers of one another.

Let this coming year, be inspired to seek God in new ways and to be a light to our church as we move into the future with eager and grateful hearts. Amen.