

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

We all have our own ways of recharging the batteries. All of us get 'run down' from time to time and we each have our special way of recharging. For some of us it's just quiet time alone...maybe reading a book or going for a walk or working in the garden. For others of us, it's time with good friends when we can talk and laugh and just enjoy each other's company. And for some of us it's going on a vacation or a retreat...a way to get away from the normal routines of life. Restoring ourselves and replenishing our supply of energy is crucial to all of us. And sometimes, like Jesus, we spend time in prayer. We reconnect with God...the very source of all that gives us life.

We know from all the stories that we've heard about Jesus that he regularly retreated into prayer in order to recharge his batteries. And we have testimony in the stories we know of him the kinds of things that happen when he is in prayer. He was in prayer after his baptism when the dove descended on him and filled him with the Holy Spirit. He spent his time in the wilderness wrestling with the devil fortified by prayer. He went up the mountain to pray just before he fed the 5,000. And he often retreated into prayer both before and after his healing miracles. As we work to follow his example, we know that time in prayer is crucial not only for him, but for us. It's the single most important thing we do to recharge our batteries...to get renewed and refreshed...to be fortified for whatever lies ahead.

Just before Jesus retreats to the mountaintop with Peter and James and John, he has an exchange with Peter. "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus asks. And just like Peter, we sometimes stumble before we come up with the answer that we have been given many times. "You are the Messiah!" says Peter. And then, just like us, he proceeds to misunderstand what that really means. He doesn't seem to 'get it' as they say. And sometimes, neither do we. For the last seven Sundays, we have been mulling over scripture passages that reveal to us exactly who Jesus is. And today, on the eighth and last Sunday after the Epiphany, we get one of the most spectacular and surreal revelations of Jesus that was ever recorded...his transfiguration at the top of the mountain.

Exhausted from their trek up the mountain with Jesus, Peter, James and John are fighting off sleep while Jesus is a bit apart from them deep in prayer. We know that Jesus goes to the tops of mountains or off by himself sometimes in order to commune with God. Those visits with his

heavenly Father provide Jesus with strength for the journey, with insight, with renewed energy and determination, and with clarity in his mission. Spending time alone with God is the way Jesus gets recharged. It's the way he centers himself on what is really important. It is where he gets his strength and his resolve for his mission is renewed. It is the example he sets for us in how to get recharged...precious time with God in prayer.

But we learn a bit more about the whole process of recharging when we consider the extra things that are added to this time of prayer that Jesus has with God. For one thing, he has taken his three closest earthly companions, Peter, James and John, to the top of the mountain with him. They constitute a fraction of Jesus' earthly community. They may be there as witnesses, but it may be that they are there because Jesus needs to share his experiences with other people who are close to him. We sometimes lose track of the very human side of Jesus, but just like us, he needs these earthly companions. The interactions that he has with his earthly community can both recharge him and drain him, just as it does us.

But woven into this story of the transfiguration of Jesus is his interactions with Biblical figures who have gone before him in death and are now part of God's heavenly kingdom. While Peter and James and John are fighting off sleep, Jesus is in deep conversation with Moses and Elijah. They are discussing Jesus' mission...what comes next...his departure from this world...his exodus so to speak. Jesus draws strength from this conversation with these two powerful servants of God who represent both the law and the prophets that are the heart of the Jewish faith. The fact that they stand with Jesus at the top of this mountain and confirm for him what his mission will require from him gives credence to Jesus' own statement that he has not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. His conversation with Moses and Elijah endorses that statement.

We all know what it's like to have a heartfelt conversation about some important event in our lives with people that we admire and trust...people whose advice we seek...people who are our supports. We know how energizing those conversations can be. They are powerful. They can shore us up when we feel weak. They can clarify for us things that we already know in our hearts. They can strengthen us in our resolve to carry on no matter what the odds. These conversations that we have with trusted and respected people in our own community can keep us on the right track. They energize us. They recharge us as nothing else can. Just when we think we're about to quit or when we think that all is lost or we have come to believe that we must have misunderstood what we were supposed to be doing, we are put right back on the right track by these wonderful friends and mentors. We all have them. We all need them. And Jesus did as well...his human self and his divine self...needed these reinforcements and confirmations. What lies ahead for Jesus is an exodus that far surpasses the exodus that Moses led when he took the people of Israel out of captivity in Egypt. Jesus will be leading all of us out

of the captivity of sin and death, but he will be doing it alone. And he will be doing it through unimaginable suffering. He needs all the recharging and reinforcing of his will that he can get. And he gets it in his conversation with Elijah and Moses. What happens to him internally, shows up on his face. He is transfigured. And it shows up in his garment which becomes dazzling white. It's a most dramatic revelation of the power of God and of Jesus' identity as the Son of God.

And just as Peter tries in vain to capture the moment by building booths for Jesus and Moses and Elijah so that all of them can stay in this moment, they are enveloped in a cloud. From that cloud comes the voice of God who says to them, "This is my Son. The chosen one. Listen to him." It's the final confirmation that Jesus needs to proceed with his mission.

But the story of the transfiguration of Jesus loses its power if it does not include that moment when Jesus and the disciples come down from the mountain. The transfigured Jesus is changed, not in his essence, but in the way he is seen. He acts in and for the world as he always has. But now we can see him as the embodiment of God. Jesus doesn't stay up in the rarefied air. He has gotten recharged. He is filled with the power of God. Even his disciples have gotten a glimpse of Jesus in the glory that is his. He takes that glory with him to the foot of the mountain.

In researching the commentaries for this sermon, I came across a wonderful memoir called *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx*. It was written by a Lutheran pastor named Heidi Neumark who tells a powerful story of transfiguration in the transformation of the church she served for nearly twenty years. Appropriately named Transfiguration Lutheran Church, the community was struggling, barely surviving when she first arrived. Standing amid poverty and the myriad of problems that can accompany such a demon---crime, drug abuse, lack of education, lack of opportunity, homelessness, and lack of hope---Transfiguration Lutheran Church mostly kept its doors shut tight to the world around it. Neumark was reminded of the story of Jesus coming down the mountain, finding a father and a child gasping for life and Jesus rebuking the unclean spirit, healing the boy and giving him back to his father. In this story, this little church found transfiguration for themselves. Things changed. They were transformed. Neumark recalled that when the disciples of this little church in the Bronx unlocked the doors of their private shelter and stepped into the neighborhood, they met the distress of the community convulsed and mauled by poverty. But they also discovered transfiguration as a congregation in connection with others. The congregation of Transfiguration Church understood: "Living high up in the rarefied air isn't the point of transfiguration...it was never meant as a private experience of spirituality removed from the public square. It was a vision to carry us down the mountainside; a glimpse of unimagined possibility at ground level."

Energy from being recharged begs to be expended. All that glow and energy needs to be used in service to the mission God has set us on. Through prayer and discernment and encouragement of one another in community, we can all learn what transfiguration really means in the world we live in. A glimpse of the kingdom of God happens through people...followers of Jesus Christ recharged and renewed and in pursuit of their own mission from God.

“Now into the World” is a Diocesan initiative that invites all of us into transformation and transfiguration with our batteries fully recharged.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.