

## Staying Woke Luke 9:28-36

Have you ever seen someone transform in front of your eyes? I've seen it many times. I have mentored seminary students, worked with them on their sermons, and then watching them deliver a sermon and see them absolutely come alive. Or sometimes I'll be friends with someone for a long time and not know that they were a singer, then experience them in concert, and the whole room pulsates at the sound of their voice. I have a friend who is a social worker, and she was telling me about how she goes into people's homes to evaluate the support needed for a child's development and how she's able to match up exactly what the child needs and the results are inspiring – and as she spoke and explained it more and more, she started to shine. This past week in St. Louis with the Methodist Church, there was one speech by a college student named JJ who got to the floor a couple times to make a speech, but what he did was preach, as he shared the call of God on his life as a gay man to become a preacher and teacher and shame on the denomination that would refuse to let him live into his call. And, he lit up, and the room and those watching the livestream were blessed with God's grace that had been so absent.

The Urban Dictionary says “Getting woke is like being in the Matrix and taking the red pill. You get a sudden understanding of what's really going on and find out you were wrong about much of what you understood to be truth.” Waking up to the realities of someone's truth, questioning and reassessing what you thought you knew, and being vulnerable to being motivated...I think is part of being woke.

Peter, James, and John had an increasing awareness that Jesus was someone pretty special. About a week prior to today's lesson, Peter had answered the question – who do you say that I am with “The Messiah of God,” and yet I'm still not convinced Peter knew exactly what he was saying or the implications of such a profession of faith. **Let's be honest, we're not always so sure either.** We say we follow Jesus, and still struggle with how that translates into our lives and what that means for the world. So, when Peter, James, and John went up the mountain with Jesus to pray, I'm not sure what they expected. I imagine that Jesus' prayer retreats sometimes took a bit, not just a simple Our Father one time through...and they were exhausted. They had trouble staying awake. I imagine the schedule of walking and teaching and preaching, and always

being ready to respond to the next direction Jesus took was pretty all consuming, so I don't fault them for being tired. But Jesus changed in those moments. His face lit up, his clothes were dazzling white – in a day before bleach...dazzling white was quite the sight. I'm not sure if Peter, James, and John would have recognized Moses and Elijah, I doubt they were wearing nametags. In spite of their exhaustion, the disciples made themselves stay awake and they heard Moses and Elijah talking about Jesus' departure. Now, Elijah had left on a chariot of fire, Moses had died before reaching the promised land. As Jesus was preparing to begin his road to Jerusalem that would lead to his death, I am sure he sought counsel, sought care, sought divine bolstering...and I think he felt it – so much so that his entire being radiated. Reminiscent of Moses' trip up the mountain when he met with God and came up with the Ten Commandments that would help foster community and a people following the Almighty God, and that work made Moses' face light up. I think that as the disciples witnessed this interaction, they were shook, they were inspired, they were afraid, they were assured that indeed – this is who Jesus is – the Messiah, the Son of God, the culmination of what started with Moses leading a people out of Egypt, continued with the prophets' teaching, and now Jesus' modeling radical inclusion and care for the least, the last, and the lost. This was a moment where Jesus wasn't the only one transformed – the disciples were too. It's no wonder Peter wanted to make sure they didn't rush it. He was awakened to a new understanding of who Jesus was, and probably more keenly aware that the next few chapters wouldn't be easy. God speaking through the clouds again makes sure the message is clear that Jesus is the Son of God and they are to listen. SO they did, and they were silent.

This week was a difficult week for me, as many of you know, I was in St. Louis as a delegate to the Methodists General Conference. At the General Conference there were beautiful, sacred moments, but they were unmatched by the painful ones where votes determined the denomination's policies on the exclusion of persons solely on the basis of sexual orientation. Same gender loving people who have served the church as clergy and laity were told once more that they would be treated differently. This general conference added extra punishment for clergy and bishops that defied the church's teaching. A few years ago, just before marriage equality passed in Illinois, a member of my church told me about how he had fallen in love with his partner. His being seemed to light up as he spoke about Edward and the ways they were so perfectly suited for one

another. They were both musicians, and they had designed stationary, invitations that transformed two bass clefs into a heart, and while they had a date and a reception venue for their wedding, they didn't know where the ceremony was to be held. Knowing the position of the denomination, he never thought he could have their wedding in his home church, but he thought he would ask. He knew that my celebrating their wedding was putting myself in some jeopardy of losing my credentials, but I spoke in a way that made him want to ask. So he did. The church gave their blessing, and we had the most amazing wedding ceremony that I've ever had the privilege to officiate. You see, I don't believe a vote can determine the sacred worth of individuals. After the wedding someone remarked that they didn't know Methodist pastors could do same sex weddings, and I smiled and said – looks like we can! And come what may, I will be faithful to my call.

I'm not sure the things that awakened your heart – where you can do no other but engage and stay woke. I think a part of the Transfiguration story is ours – the ways that we too experience God's movement that seems extraordinary and beyond belief. The moments when we light up, and hear God's voice loud and clear. Thomas Merton once said, "We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time." Where have we seen God shining through? Where have we seen God shining through us?

The world is shaking...things are shifting...testimonies in Congress, elections leading to run off between two African American women, religious institutions coming to terms with their failures...people are waking up, and the opportunities abound for us to not only observe the glory of God in action, but to become a part of the transformation ourselves. As we prepare for the season of Lent, where we will bare our souls and seek to right our relationships with God and each other, I pray that in fact today is the day of pretty incredible things that God is about to do through you and me. After the experience on the mountain, they didn't build the tents to stay, but went back down and got to work saving the world. And so shall we. Amen.