

## **Sunday March 2, 2025**

### **Transfiguration Sunday**

#### MEDITATION “Beacons of Hope”

Last night Boler Mountain set off a fireworks display; a display they had postponed from Family Day due to high winds. Standing there, transfixed, looking out my living room window I wound up taking a journey back to my youth, and thinking about some of the joys of childhood. I thought about my experience at camp, years ago on the boundary of Algonquin Park. One of the highlights of that camp, for me, was a day-long journey we took.

We all have our journeys in life. The Israelites left Egypt and went on a journey to the promised land. The Disciples were on a journey to a new kingdom, a golden era, in which there would be justice and peace for all: a place where everyone would have their own vineyard, and everyone would sit in the shade of their own fig tree. At camp, all we sought was an abandoned fire watch tower.

As we journeyed towards the tower, sometimes we could see it, but at other times, hills and trees obscured it from view. At still other times we could see it, but there were obstacles like swamps in the way. Our journey seemed to go on forever, and at times we despaired that, not only would we never make it, but that we would get hopelessly lost in the process.

But by taking advantage of orienteering practices we picked reference points to guide us when we could not see our destination. They were like little guide posts, little beacons of hope along the way, just the way lighthouses are beacons of hope for sailors – as they mark not only danger, but landfall.

Now the disciples weren't quite sure of the details of the route, but heck, they had the Messiah with them, so there was no need to worry about it. And they were doing alright on their journey, until Jesus announced that he was to die soon. This caused them to despair. Was their destination still this new

kingdom? How would they get there without the Messiah? The cross was obscuring their view of the kingdom, but Jesus said, just trust me on this.

He took three of them up a mountain and something wonderful happened, something even more wonderful than the fireworks in last night's darkness. He was transfigured, or transformed. Now we aren't talking cheap theatrics where God shines some spotlight down on Jesus. We are talking about something more profound. Sort of like when we turn the dimmer switch and the soft light by which we dined is turned into a bright light, revealing its true nature. That is what happened to Jesus. He revealed his true nature. He revealed himself as God; and not only as God, but as God with the disciples. And he shone so brightly that it hurt to look at him.

The image of Jesus' radiance reminds me of the pillar of fire that accompanied the Israelites as they started out toward the Promised Land. It was a reference point which the people travelled toward, yet it was no ordinary reference point, for as the people moved, so did the pillar of fire.

Now I realize that we aren't in the wilderness of Sinai, or on the road to Jerusalem with Jesus, or at camp, but we are all on a journey. We are all on a faith journey, and on every journey there are obstacles and times when we lose sight of the goal.

When I was in my first term as seminary, my ultimate goal was to become a minister of the United Church. There were lots of assignments and essays due, and on top of it, we had exams looming. Then I got my bill for my fees for second term. And, as if that wasn't enough, the doctor told me that it looked like I had some skin cancer on my back. Just like that fire tower hidden behind the hills, my goal was quickly obscured by more pressing concerns. And where had Jesus gone, just as I needed him most?

Then something amazing happened. There were a whole series of little signs of hope. Someone approached me about setting up a study group for our dreaded Old Testament exam. And a bursary cheque arrived just days before

fees were due. And then the doctor announced that, while it was cancer, it was only basal cell carcinoma, and he had successfully removed all of it.

When my father was nearing the end of his working days and preparing for retirement he had a near fatal bleed. The diagnosis, which took some time to arrive at, was cancer. He did not expect to live to the age of 70. And then there was a new treatment – monoclonal antibodies. Most cancer cells produce an antigen. The doctors were able to isolate the specific antigen that his cancer cells were producing and, in a lab, create a sufficient number of antibodies that would attack only the cells containing that specific antigen, and kill those cells, and only those cells. The treatment, actually there were more than one since only most of the cancer cells produce the antigen, so there were always a few cancer cells left after each treatment, the treatments worked and he enjoyed an extra ten years of reasonable health.

When we get the bad news of cancer or dementia, fear can set in and obscure hope for the future. When we lose our job and can't get another, we can be overwhelmed by despair and we can't see how things will work out. When we have difficult decisions to make that we may not want to face because we don't know how things will work out. When....you get the picture. It doesn't matter what the obstacle is, we all have them in life. And when we have them, we can lose hope. We can end up feeling that God has forsaken us, just as Jesus felt on the cross. The good news is that God never forsakes us, rather, God is there with us on the journey. We can find God in all the little guide posts or beacons of hope along the way. Jesus really is like that pillar of fire, travelling along with us.

This week we start a new journey. It starts here, with the revelation of Jesus as God with us. It moves through lent, on to the cross, and finally ends at the resurrection. As we journey through Lent this year, let's keep an eye out for Jesus. Not just at the end, but along the way, located in all of those little beacons of hope we pass every day.