

Last Epiphany: 3/3/19
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The Last Sunday after the Epiphany (Transfiguration Sunday) and a Day of Racial Healing, Justice & Reconciliation – not things I would've necessarily put together. Most of the rest of the ECCT observed this day of racial healing a few weeks ago, back when our Confirmands led the service here and we wanted to give them free rein.

So we've landed on this combination mostly by happenstance. But when you think about it, most any gospel reading would speak to the urgency of racial healing. By definition, gospel readings are about Jesus. A peasant of the Middle East, a self-taught Rabbi, who embodies the creative and redeeming love of God in his very flesh. Flesh, I would imagine, that's considerably darker than mine. Who incarnates all that it is to be human, to show us how to live as God intends.

And so Jesus provides hospitality across boundaries – religious, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, physical/mental disabilities, and racial. In Jesus, there are no outcasts. He talks to the wrong people, eats with the wrong people, heals the wrong people.

Honestly, I challenge you at home to randomly open your Bible to any gospel passage and see what you find.

Just look at today's gospel, always the spectacular story of the Transfiguration on this Last Sunday *after* the Epiphany. It starts off quietly enough. Jesus takes the disciples Peter, John and James with him up a mountain to pray.

While Jesus is praying the disciples see that he's, well, *transfigured* into glorious light and accompanied by the great Hebrew prophets Moses and Elijah, whose presence foretells the coming of the Messiah.

Naturally the disciples want to capture the moment, box it in. But their small plans are interrupted by a voice from heaven reaffirming what Jesus heard at his baptism in the River Jordan: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"
Listen to him.

In the midst of such majesty it may seem trite to quote the adage, "Actions speak louder than words."
But this is what happens next.
The disciples keep silent about what they've experienced.
Jesus leads them down the mountain, back to the flat, mundane place where most of us spend most of our time.

Immediately it's back to business, with crowds pressing in upon Jesus. A desperate man is begging Jesus to heal his only son.

Of course Jesus heals him.
But not before pausing to rebuke the disciples for not doing so sooner.
Jesus delays the poor child's healing long enough to rebuke the disciples for not doing it themselves in his name.

You see, the healing of divisions –
be they physical or racial or whatever divides us --
is not just for Jesus,
but for each of us who are his disciples.

Jesus reveals exactly who he is and what we're getting ourselves into, down in the plain of the everyday just as much as on the mountaintop. What could be more spectacular, more glorious, to that desperate father than to have his son transfigured into health and wholeness?

That's what God in Christ Jesus intends for us all --
as individuals, a church community, and this world God so loves.
I wonder if it begins with us *confessing our need* for healing.
I wonder if one of the greatest impediments to racial healing
is our reluctance to admit that we need to be healed of our racism.

Why is this so hard?

Like you, I try to be a pretty nice person. I try to be a faithful Christian.
I doubt anyone's too worried about me running off to join the Klan.
Or using racial slurs. Or telling a racially offensive joke, or
even laughing at one.
Why, I can literally stand up here and say one of my "best friends" and most
frequent house guests is African-American.

But I'm also a white person enjoying the privileges of
a predominantly white culture,
who often takes those privileges for granted.
I'm a frail and limited human.
A sinner in need of redemption.
A person who struggles with racism and racial stereotyping,
or at least racial cluelessness --
not so much out of spite (at least I'd like to think)
as from ignorance and conditioning.
The human conditioning...

How can I ever be healed as God intends
if I don't confess my need of healing?
If I don't call out to Jesus,
like that desperate man waiting for him at the foot of the mountain?

Jesus comes to us where we are, no matter how low we are.
Jesus knows our sin and our need
even before we ask for forgiveness and healing.
Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves.
So why are we so reluctant to admit our sin of racism, even to ourselves?

We accept Jesus' forgiveness and healing by asking for it.
Confessing our need of it.
Seeking to be changed, transfigured,
into who we really are, who God created us to be:
Reconciled with God and all our neighbors.

And, then,
remembering Jesus' witness that actions really do speak louder than words,
become ambassadors of reconciliation,
sinners sharing with others the grace we've received
and working with Jesus to break down the walls that divide us.

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