

Transfiguration Sunday (A/RCL)  
2 Peter 1.16-21  
February 3, 2008  
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

Have you ever noticed it's dangerous to get dressed in the dark?? When I was a brand new Lutheran, living in Illinois, serving as a hospital chaplain, I belonged to the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit in Riverwoods, IL, outside of Chicago. I volunteered to go to MetroChicago's annual Synod Assembly as one of my congregation's voting members. My pastor knew I was hoping to enter the candidacy process to move toward ordination, so he was anxious to take that opportunity to introduce me to Bishop Sherman Hicks, who served MetroChicago at that time. I had to get up very early to carpool with the other folks who were going to the Assembly from my church. I didn't want to wake anyone up in the house, so I didn't turn on the light in my walk-in closet. I got dressed and left, not **totally** realizing what I looked like ☺.

Later in the morning, as I was being introduced to the Bishop as a young woman who hoped to be considered someday for ordination, I looked down and realized that I was wearing two different shoes. Fortunately I at least had a right and a left on the proper feet, but one was black and the other was navy blue, and the heels were a slightly different height. So much for favorable first impressions! Fortunately Bishop Hicks either didn't notice or didn't care, though, because five years later I knelt before him, he placed his hands on my head, prayed and set me apart for a ministry of Word and Sacrament in Christ's Church.

Just like it's dangerous to get dressed in the dark, it's dangerous to walk in the dark. There's probably nobody here who hasn't gotten up in the darkness really late or really early, tried to "run silent, run deep," navigating without light, then tripped over the dog's bone, the dog, the laundry basket, a school knapsack, or any of a thousand other wayward objects left where they never should have been. Hopefully we just stumble for a moment and then catch

ourselves, or stub a toe, but we've all heard of folks who have broken a bone or their noggin when they've gone flying.

We need **light**, precious light, to make our way safely through the darkness.

“[A] lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1.19)

is how the Word of God is described in this weekend's lesson from the Second Letter of Peter.

Along the same lines, Psalm 119, verse 105, says,

Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path.

This weekend of the Transfiguration, the last weekend before Ash Wednesday which is the beginning of Lent, provides us with the contrast of a blazing, dazzling vision of Jesus transfigured on the Mount and this reference in Second Peter to the “dark place” which needs to be lit up, meaning this world in which we live!

Think of the verse near the start of St. John's Gospel:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.  
(John 1.5)

The “light” is Jesus, who calls Himself the Light of the world later in that Gospel (John 8.12).

(This is the same Jesus whom Second Peter refers to as the “morning star that rises in our hearts.”) It's important to notice that St. John doesn't say that the light **obliterated** the darkness. It hasn't, yet. But he does say, “the darkness did not **overcome** it.” We still have to cope with the darkness of this world, but we're **able** to, because the Holy Spirit pierces it with the light that shines forth from the written Word of God, and with the light that is the living Word of God, our Lord Jesus.

The first time I began to really **appreciate** the incredibly life-giving gift of God's Word was as a teenager. It was through my involvement with the charismatic renewal while I was in high school that I came to believe that God's Word **is** a lamp shining in a dark place, a lamp to my feet, a light to my path. As a child, I knew that the **Sacraments** were a gift from God. In my

teens, I learned that the **Word** is as well. As a twenty-something Roman Catholic laywoman, studying *Major Themes in Luther's Theology* in seminary, I learned that both Word **and** Sacrament are “the means of grace,” the audible, visible, touchable, tastable, smellable channels through which God’s love flows into our lives. One wintry evening I then became a minister of Word and Sacrament, and now it is an endless source of joy for me to share the Word and Sacrament with you.

Why would we choose to stumble in darkness when we have the chance to light up the path before us with the radiant light of the Word? Some of you live in the Word already, opening your Bibles every day, hearing the Lord’s voice speak to you through whatever you prayerfully read. Nobody receives blinding revelations every day; but for those who faithfully dwell in the Word, inspiration is there, when it is needed. Sometimes the verse that says nothing to me today stays tucked away in a corner of my heart, and speaks volumes to me on another day, in another circumstance. Or sometimes I share a verse with a friend or parishioner, realizing that when I have reached the bottom of my little well of wisdom, God provides an ocean.

In the Lenten letter you may have received already or hopefully will on Monday, I mention different opportunities we’ll have this Lent to treasure the Word in our hearts. Subscribe to daily on-line devotions, and see how your neighbors in the pew see the Word lighting up their lives. Come to midweek Lenten services, and hear how five of our laypeople have met Jesus along the Way and in the Word. Join Pastors Beth and Bob for adult forum beginning on Feb. 17 to explore the Lenten Sunday Gospels. Try something new and join me for Soup & Scripture at First Pres. from noon to 1 on Wednesdays, beginning this week. And if none of that is possible, take a copy of *Christ in Our Home* and invest five minutes as you eat breakfast or wait for the train in reading a few verses of the Word and a tiny page-long devotion, to center you in God, to set the Word as a lamp shining in a dark place....

If you have a feeling you've heard something a lot like this passage from Second Peter recently, you're right. Our benediction for the season of Epiphany comes directly from it:

Be attentive to the glory of God,  
as to a lamp shining in a dark place,  
until God's day dawns  
and the Morning Star rises in your hearts.

Walk safely in the dark, blessed by the light of the written and living Word of God, until

...there will be no night;  
[and we will] need no light of lamp or sun,  
for the Lord God will be [our] light....  
Revelation 22.5

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham