

Vision & Reality  
2/14/10 Transfiguration

While changing planes in Atlanta, on the way to my mom's Memorial in Myrtle Beach, without any warning, the nosepiece of my glasses broke, and they fell off my face in 2 pieces. Now some glasses are made to do that, and to go back together - mine weren't. Mine were broken, and couldn't just be perched there on my nose again. I had to negotiate the rest of the trip with my near-sighted vision, which actually wasn't too bad - I can see fuzzily down the halls, and can read books fine. It just felt weird - no glasses on my nose, no lines around the edges of my vision where I had to ignore the frames, no shifting of my head up and down to see through the different parts of my progressive lenses. Good thing I was being met at the airport - I can't drive legally without my glasses. Fortunately, I got some kind of super glue stuff and fixed them well enough to get back here and get an appointment for new glasses.

I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade when a school eye test result sent me to the eye doctor, and I chose my first pair of frames in Cuddle Brown, and waited rather impatiently for them to come in. It was sure weird to see things so clearly on that drive home. I suddenly realized why I could never pick out the deer my mom would get so excited about, pointing to them and trying to get me to see them, too. And I suddenly realized that I could see leaves on the trees, read signs before I was right on top of them, and didn't have to squint to see the chalk board at school. It was great to finally see what was there. Obviously, I hadn't even known what I was missing.

Another vision change happened when I was a teenager - I was out in the park with my dog, looking around at the spring hillside, and it suddenly hit me that the world was in living color. Sounds silly, doesn't it? Or like some kids near me had been smoking non-tobacco products.... But I guess I'd taken it for granted - obviously I knew my colors already; it was just a glorious moment when I saw that the spring flowers were as vivid as the fakey plastic ones in the stores, and realized that God put green and blue together in the sky and trees, even though my mom taught me never to wear them together (this was before the preppie look was popular). Color was all around me; I was awash in color. It was beautiful. I've never forgotten it.

Yet another vision change came from watching Carl Sagan's Cosmos series on TV as a young adult, and how that changed the way I looked at the world again. I was never much for science, but suddenly I was captivated as he talked about the "billions & billions" of stars in our universe, and touching a tree trunk, told me that both it and my own body were made from the same "star stuff" floating around the cosmos. I'd had science classes, learned the Periodic Table of the Elements and all that – but watching Carl Sagan that day opened up the reality of what was there. From that start, science has continued to awe me, astound me, as I've read about the extremely miniscule parts of the body that have to do their thing in order for me to live and move; and then as I've read about the macrocosm things like how huge the sun is, and our Milky Way galaxy, and all the other wonders of the heavens. The mind boggles.

This is more a perception change that happened from a class I took for Continuing Education a while back. The leader had us all lying on the ground looking up into the sky, and trying to shift our perceptions of up being sky and down being earth. In the reality of space, we could be on the bottom of the globe of earth, held to the surface only by gravity, or else we'd float out into space and off the planet. That was a really weird feeling – but you know, that's what's really true. Another exercise we did was to look at the sunset, and tell ourselves over and over, "The sun isn't moving; our planet is moving. And we are standing on a spot that is rotating out of the sun's light." Because that's what's really true, too. Talk about a change in perspective!

OK, that's a lot of personal stories, and I think you get the gist of them – they are all about seeing more of the reality that's actually been there all the time. All along I was seeing with my eyes, but they told me things that were actually inadequate. I only saw what I thought I knew. I needed corrective lenses as well as corrective knowledge.

The lenses of faith give us yet another way of seeing reality, another level of what is here, what is true about life. How can we live as full persons if we don't know the truth about life? Faith tells us both that we are made of dust yet imbued with the breath of God. Faith tells us that God set us in relationships on purpose, and that we are indeed our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Faith tells us that all around us was made by God and is sustained by God, the very work of God's hands, God's self-expression as it were, and full of God. Faith also tells us a less pleasant truth, that we are fallen and finite. Then faith tells us

that God has sought us and found us, and made a way to restore us through the work of Jesus the Christ. Faith looks out on the world made by God, and sees that we are placed here by God, and that God has intentions for us – not just to grow into closer relationship personally, but also to carry that good news, act that good news, for all humanity. Faith changes our perspective. Life isn't just a rat race, our purpose isn't just to get ahead and win, the goal is not to have the most toys. We live to God, through God and for God. That's really different.

On that mountain praying with their friend Jesus in our text this morning, those disciples saw reality a new way, too. In what our Celtic Christian ancestors might have called a "thin place," they saw their human friend Jesus shining with the light of the divine, his glory coming through, God's eternal purpose from the beginning through the years of Moses & Elijah, and Jesus' coming departure. Interestingly, the word there is actually "exodus", in an echo of that great event of deliverance in the Old Testament. The disciples are scared out of their wits, mumbling inadequate things because they don't know how to act. The truth about Jesus has been true all the time they've been together, of course, but somehow for a moment they can actually see it with their eyes. I think it changed everything, although I'm sure it took them some time to process it, and they had to misunderstand here and there. After the resurrection, though, it all came together with great energy and power, this reality that they glimpsed there on the mountain. It took some time for everything they thought they knew to reorganize around this reality that they saw for the first time, because it's a biggie – its major. This new vision had to make them reorient their whole understanding, their whole living.

I'm not aware of anyone who's had this kind of experience nowadays, although I know some folks who've had intriguing experiences with God that have changed their lives and opened their eyes to a new vision. But this moment we call Transfiguration is shared with us in our Scriptures, this ultimate reality that our eyes don't always see, nor our minds always comprehend. It's the truth of the world we live in; we just need faith glasses to see it. The glory of God is all around us; the love of God permeates all that is; the purposes of God in Jesus have been intended for all time and all people, and are written in the fabric of reality. This is what is true. If we don't see it, it's because we're too near-sighted. Glory hovers, shimmering just underneath our normal perception. Every once in a while,

however, we catch a glimpse. And meanwhile we know its there. This reality of God and God's purposes lies just below the surface of everything we do, everything we experience, everything we feel. This is the context in which we talk to friends, cook for our families, fight with our siblings, vote for leaders, worship, play, laugh, love, work, ...everything. Its what makes we Christians distinct from those that don't see this aspect of reality – literally, they live in a different world – one not suffused with God; which is less than reality. In a world where God isn't part of everything, its easy to treat people poorly, its easy to set less noble goals, its easy to act as if nothing mattered – because it's a lesser perspective.

Just as I learned to see the leaves around me, and then the spectacular colors, and then then the depth of intricacy in creation, and then to know myself in the cosmos, I am continuing to learn the depth of mystery and God that are acted out here in this world, in each day, each encounter. This is the reality in which we live. AMEN.