

Christ, the Light of the World

Transfiguration A

Text: Matthew 17:1–9

March 6, 2011

A GPS for the Journey

One of the joys of serving as the pastor of Apostles
is being a part of our annual Boar's Head Festival.
It is a real blessing to me to see so many people of the congregation
involved in this wonderful ministry.
It is also a joy because we are a welcoming congregation
that embraces non-members
who wish to participate in the production.

This year, the young man who was
the bearer of the Star of the East
was a friend of the VanEpps family.
He has never been a part of a church
and wasn't all that familiar with
the Christmas story.

Because of that,
he didn't know why he was carrying the star
until Michele told him the story of the Wise Men.
After she told him about the Wise Men, he said,
I get it.
I'm the GPS that leads them to Jesus.

GPS, Global Positioning System, is a great tool that helps us get where we want to go.
I have one in my car,
and it takes the anxiety out of driving to places I have never been before.
All I have to do is enter the address and the GPS will do the rest.
Triangulating off of several satellites in geosynchronous orbit,
it will determine where I am and select the best route
to take me where I want to go.

The Star of the East served the same function leading the Magi to Jesus.
In the Transfiguration of Jesus,
we have another GPS for the journey of faith.

As Jesus and the inner circle of Peter, James and John are on the mountaintop,
the voice of God speaks to them from the cloud,
This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased.
This scene on the mountain will become a reference point for the disciples
in the days ahead as they make the
journey to the cross and beyond with Jesus.

When I think of the place of the Transfiguration of Jesus in the journey of faith,
the image that comes to my mind is the very cross
that you see projected on the wall.

This cross is on the top of a mountain on the campus of
 the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee
 where our daughter, Beth, went to college.
 When you are driving from the town of Winchester toward Sewanee,
 the cross becomes visible in Cowpins,
 several miles from the base of the mountain where the university is located.

Whenever we visited with Beth,
 we would always make at least one trip to Winchester
 to get things she needed.
 Whether we were driving down the mountain or heading back up to Sewanee,
 I always looked for the cross.
 It was like a GPS showing us the way.

On the trips back to campus,
 once we got to the foot of the mountain and started up the winding road,
 the cross would be hidden from view for the most part.
 There were, however, a few places along the way
 where we would catch a
 brief glimpse of the cross.

Those glimpses served as powerful and inspiring reminders
 that we were on the right path
 and would be back at Sewanee soon.
 The glimpses also reminded us
 that the light of the cross
 was always shining in the darkness.

That's the way it is with the Transfiguration.
 This is a seminal event for Jesus and for the disciples
 as the journey to the cross gets underway.

The Transfiguration serves as a landmark or guidepost for the journey.
 It gives them the assurance that as difficult as the journey is
 they are on the right path.
 The Transfiguration is an affirmation that
 Jesus is the beloved Son of God
 with whom the Father is well pleased.

Throughout the journey of faith,
 there will be times when we can get sidetracked
 and lose our way.

The devastating death of a loved one, the unexpected loss of a job,
 random acts of violence perpetrated against us or others,
 unwarranted attacks on our character,
 the mean-spiritedness of a *friend* or fellow worker that cuts us to the core
 can distract or disorient us leading us to turn away from God
 and give up on the journey of faith.

Back in 1965 when I was a senior in high school,
I had a wonderful opportunity to take
a school trip to New York City.

For a kid growing up in Jacksonville,
New York was almost
beyond comprehension.
The size, the hustle & bustle, the experiences & opportunities
offered by New York
were beyond my wildest dreams.

While we were there we had the opportunity to see all the sights:
the Statue of Liberty...the U N...the Empire State Building
...Grand Central Station.
And we got to sample the cultural offerings: the Metropolitan Museum of Art...
Metropolitan Opera...Broadway...Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts...
the New York State Theater of Ballet...a concert with Roberta Peters.

We even had the opportunity to go out in groups and explore a little on our own.
When we went out in groups, we usually rode the subways, and after a few days
we got to the point where we could find our way around pretty well.

We were able to travel all over New York on the subways
which we found to be exciting and fun.
Getting around topside wasn't bad either.
We would use buildings as landmarks,
to find our way back and forth between the entrance to the subway
and the hotel or the place we were visiting.

Everything was fine until one day a near disaster happened.
After visiting some place, we got on a subway to go back to our hotel,
but unbeknownst to us, it was a different line.
Being from out of town,
we simply were not aware that there was
more than one subway system in New York.

When we got off at the station serving our stop and came up to the street,
everything was wrong;
none of the familiar landmarks were there.
After a mild case of panic, we began to move out from the subway steps.
We probed a block this way and that
making sure we had our bearings back to the station.

Finally, after we got several blocks from the station,
we caught sight of
one of our landmarks,
and once we had that landmark in sight
we were able
to find our way home.

Today, as we celebrate the Transfiguration,
we are preparing to embark on
the journey that leads to the cross.

In this journey of faith there will be many challenges
that can get us sidetracked, distracted
perhaps even lost.

Life in general, and life in faith in particular
can be filled with many
unexpected and unpleasant surprises.

After all, who in the world would expect
the holy and innocent Son of God
to die on the cross.

Who in the world would expect
suffering and death
to be the doorway to life everlasting.

In the midst of the mysteries and conundrums of life
that would cause us to doubt and perhaps even give upon Jesus,
the Transfiguration stands as the landmark
the GPS of the journey
assuring us that we are on the right path—
that Jesus is the *beloved Son of God*
with who God is well pleased.

