

## Shining for the Kingdom

February 15, 2025

Transfiguration Sunday

Luke 9:21-36, 43b-45

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This week, many of us are reeling with the news of the tragic shooting in Tumbler Ridge BC. We are grief stricken for the suffering of the families who have loved ones who were killed, most of whom were youth who had their whole future ahead of them, as well as the students, teachers and staff of the school who would have been traumatized by the incident. In learning about the identity of the shooter, who is a transgender female, some of us can't help but wonder what role transphobia might have played in this tragedy, and what kind of suffering they might have been experiencing. All of this, is on top of everything else going on in the world and our lives, which can be one more thing that can feel like too its much to bear. Yet bear it we must, and so we seek to find ways to support ourselves and others in all that we experience and are facing.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus was aware of the suffering of the people he was teaching and healing, as victims of a region occupied by the Roman Empire. He was also aware of the suffering and certain death he would face as he prepared to head to Jerusalem. In light of this, he heads up a mountain to pray with three of his disciples, Peter, James and John. As he was praying, he is transformed, his face shone, and clothes became dazzling white, similar to how Moses appeared in our Old Testament reading after being in the presence of God when he received the ten commandments. Then Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah, ancestors of his faith. We are told they were talking about his departure – which was his heading to Jerusalem and his death and resurrection that would take place there. I imagine he received comfort, encouragement and support through this experience, this conversation.

Public Theologian and pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, [Jen Bailey](#), identifies herself as the breathing legacy of one of America's

great original sins, the child of people stolen from the West African coasts to labor in the fields of Florida, Georgia, and Arkansas. In a season of deep personal stress and pain, she recalls that the pain was so great that she

“folded into myself: my arms wrapped tightly around my knees and found their rest on my heaving chest. Yet, as I opened my mouth to cry out to God, as I often do in moments of hopelessness, no sound emerged. My eyelids began to puff and tears stung as they fell down my cheek praying the prayers whose words alluded me. Rocking back and forth on the cool linoleum floor, I finally uttered the only words that I could find, “I don’t feel safe. I don’t feel safe.” Like a gust of wind, I could suddenly feel the soulful presence of my ancestors surround me, holding me and bearing witness to my pain. Then I heard my mama’s spirit whisper gently, gently in my ear, *‘Baby, we ain’t never been safe’*”.

In a similar way, in a time when Jesus has announced that there is no safety for those who follow him, Jesus and the disciples experience the presence of Moses and Elijah, their ancestors in faith. The love, support and commitment of our ancestors and their presence with us can help us to endure.

At last week’s Courageous Faith session, where we listen to a speaker and have conversation afterwards, we heard from Mariann Budde, Episcopal Bishop of Washington DC. Bishop Budde is known for her speaking truth to power at the Washington National Prayer Service which President Trump attended the week of his inauguration, as she asked him to have mercy on immigrants. In the Courageous Faith interview, she talked about what is helping her get through these challenging times and how looking to periods in history where there was retrenchment after periods of progress helps. She named the period after emancipation from slavery and the segregation, oppression, and violence like lynchings that black people experienced. She looked to those people of courage and integrity during that time and how they lived through it. Bishop Budde named that those working for justice and seeking what is right, did so with hope and passion

and commitment, and did not see the success or progress of their work but it came to fruition sometimes generations later. Knowing this helps maintain grounding for her, for us, as we resist injustice and stand up for love and compassion. It is gaining hope and strength from the ancestors who have persevered before us and who laid the groundwork for success and progress that happened later.

In all this, we can also remember, as Jesus knew as well, that we are not alone, as our United Church Creed says. God is with us in all that we go through and experience. There may be times when we feel we are alone, when we feel abandoned. This can particularly be the case if we believe in a God that is exterior to us, separate from us, over and above us. However, if we believe in a God who is in and with us, that we all have the divine spark of God in each of us, then, even if our spark feels dim or even out, we can experience God's love and support, God's presence and shining light through the love and support and light of those around us. God is with us, even in the most difficult times. Our work, our challenge, is to draw on that support in the community around us, and not go through things alone.

The gospel story also has the significant moment where a voice from the clouds speaks to Peter and the other disciples, saying, "this is my son, my chosen, listen to him!" Jesus is affirmed as God's son, chosen and commissioned to live out God's will and enact God's Kingdom on earth. Jesus throughout the gospels proclaimed the Kingdom of God is here with his coming. He also encouraged his followers to proclaim and live out the Kingdom here on earth. Indeed, the prayer he taught, names for God's kingdom to come here on earth, as in heaven. So, we too are called to enact, to live out, the kingdom here on earth. We can do so in so many ways as we seek to be faithful.

We enact the kingdom when we write letters to politicians to address poverty and houselessness, as our Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Books, study group did this week.

We enact the kingdom when we learn about Black History month, celebrate and honour diversity like we did at Messy Church and as we will at our Community Dinner this week, through experiencing African food and hearing a speaker originally from Africa.

We enact the kingdom through writing our own land acknowledgements like the Women's Spirituality Breakfast did yesterday.

We enact the kingdom when we celebrate World Religion Day and learn about other religions and see our commonalities.

We enact the kingdom when people gather to sing for peace and love, as a protest against ICE in Minneapolis did on February 1, as seen in this video by Doug Pagitt of Common Good.

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ZLbRXJUSRyl>

May we have courage and gain strength from our ancestors, from Jesus, to enact the kingdom and know we are not alone as we move through these challenging times. May the light that shone through Jesus, shine through us, as we seek to live out God's calling and transform lives and care for the earth. May we know God's love through the love, support, and presence of those around us, in our day to day lives, that we all may shine. Amen.