**February 24, 2019**

**Luke 9:28-36**

Today is the Transfiguration Sunday. It is when we tell the story of how the disciples experienced God’s glory on a mountaintop. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all reported that Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain. (Reminiscent of Moses’ and Elijah’s own journeys up mountains to be with God.) While they were up there, Jesus’ appearance changed to glowing and dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared and started talking with Jesus about his coming death. Peter, James, and John were mystified by what was happening, but they had enough wherewithal to not *just* stand on the sidelines. Peter said, “Let us build dwellings for each of you.”

When Peter realized that something significant was happening on the mountain, he offered to mark the spot for them. He wanted to build a place where they could enjoy the current fellowship, and possibly return to see someday. He wanted to honor the community there, and leave a legacy for the community that would continue.

It is human instinct to mark the spot. When something significant happens in a particular place, people can’t stop themselves from solidifying a memory or experience. We leave flowers at the scene of tragic accidents. We build monuments after big events. And sometimes we build buildings on sacred spaces in an attempt to bring permanence to a special moment, while also dreaming of future visitors who might also experience something special in this place.

We say that we are standing on holy ground, but the markers we build are not just about a special *place;* the markers are a testament to the person and community experienced there. We don’t visit cemeteries to just see someone’s gravestone; we go to remember the person that was and the memories shared. We return to our *alma maters* after graduation to remember our teachers and classmates and memories great and small. We return to a particular beach or vacation spot because it’s beautiful or quiet AND because we want to revisit the community between nature and ourselves (and maybe with family or others who accompanied us there).

So it is with Sweet Hollow. One hundred and ninety years ago some farmers decided to mark the spot where they found community with one another and God. They had been traveling to Huntington’s Old First Presbyterian Church, but decided to build a small church closer to home. They wanted a sacred place within reach. Someplace they could easily visit. Founding member Zophar Ketchum wrote a poem about the organizational process in 1828 and 1829:

The people of a certain place,

Who had a hard and tiresome case,

To go so great a length of road, [up to Huntington]

To pay their worship to the Lord.

Thro’ winter’s cold and summer’s heat,

With shivering limbs and pain and sweat,

They did desire some better way

To spend the holy Sabbath Day…

The house was framed -- foundation laid,

And for a raising ready made;

In eighteen hundred twenty-nine,

The men together, did combine.

One afternoon on Saturday

They raised the house the ninth of May,

And on the twenty-fifth of May

‘Twas arranged in a decent way.

The Reverend Mr. John Goldsmith,

Upon a subject preached therewith:

Here on this rock we’ll build our church

And nothing shall disturb it much.

So may [God] bless Sweet Hollow Church,

And add new members to it much,

That oft it may be handed down

To generations yet unborn.

Sweet Hollow has been a sacred space for generations. Promises have been made around the baptismal fount. Meals have been shared around the Table. Prayers have been said and tears shed. Certainly, God’s glory has been seen. And here we still gather here, celebrating the community that God still has with the people of Melville, and delighting in the community built between one another. Those that first marked God’s presence in the Sweet Hollow woods are not here to tell us firsthand of what they saw or knew, but they had us in mind. They wanted to give a place to “generations yet unborn” who might also share God’s glory together.

Baptism and Communion are the sacraments wherein time and space and community and glory. We pour water into the font remembering God’s glory seen by generations before us. We remember the disciples who were baptized by Pentecostal fire. We remember our ancestors and forebears – some of whom were baptized in this very building – and give thanks for their Christian discipleship. We are here because they were here. We dare to answer “yes” to ancient baptismal questions because they have shown us the way. And today, we pour water from this common font onto wee Kivrin’s head trusting that she, too, will see God’s glory and follow Christ into life. Then we sit down at the Table to taste of God’s glory in the everyday simple gifts of bread and wine.

The Transfiguration was an experience of God’s glory by an intimate community in a particular sacred space. Though we could build a memorial to an experience with God’s glory, we cannot save a glimmer for posterity. God’s glory goes where it will, unable to be kept or trapped or tamed. God’s glory blazes around the world and into people’s hearts as God intends. Thanks be to God for the ongoing gifts of grace and glory which we experience every time we are together – in this sacred space – as a community: praising, praying, baptizing, and eating. *Gloria in excelsis Deo!* Amen.