

Revealing True Natures
Luke 9:28-36
Colebrook Congregational Church
February 7, 2016

For the majority of the last liturgical year, we focused on the Gospel of Mark and his rushed performance heading towards the cross, and this liturgical year, we will be focusing mostly on the Gospel of Luke, with a couple of side trips to see John.

The Gospel of Luke is unique in the Bible because it has a sequel. Both have separate aims and characters, geography, and all that; but they share a common literary style, themes, and theological issues. Luke and Acts are the largest contribution to the New Testament by a single author! One of my professors once said, Luke is the Gospel of Jesus and Acts is the Gospel of the Church.

The themes of repentance and forgiveness are the defining features of both books, as well as featuring prominently: the Temple, Jerusalem, Mary, and the Holy Spirit. Luke is also characterized by the attention to and concern for the oppressed and the marginalized persons in society. Also the themes of promise and fulfillment, that the prophecies of Jesus are completed by the life of the Church. The Gospel anticipates Acts, and Acts reflects upon the Gospel. And many accounts in the Gospel have a companion story in Acts.

The author is anonymous, and he is addressing both books to someone named Theophilius, which is Greek for “Friend of God.” The author says that he is not a witness to these events, but the chronicler for those who were witnesses. He knows of the existence of other gospels, and assumes that his audience is well aware of them as well.

His writing style indicates an educated person who is well versed in the contemporary narrative styles. He has a thorough knowledge of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, which was widely used in the Hellenistic synagogues. However, it is unclear whether he was a convert from Judaism or paganism.

Each Gospel has its own flavor and style. Mark, as we covered, was the one

with jazz hands. Luke is thought to be a physician, because of the heavy reliance on medical terminology and healings. How I associate them: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; is as Teacher, Performer, Physician, and Theologian.

This Sunday, the last one of the Epiphany season, celebrating the reveals about Jesus' true nature, is Transfiguration Sunday, where Jesus is revealed as the Son of God, by God, and in front of witnesses. Jesus' true nature was revealed very publicly and definitively at His resurrection, but a select few, Peter, James, & John, are allowed a preview!

This incident is paralleled in all Four Gospels. The accounts in Matthew and Mark are nearly identical; John's is the shortest; and Luke is the longest and most detailed account.

Chapter 9 is all about Jesus and his relationship with the Disciples. Right before our selection, Peter confesses that he assumes that Jesus is the Messiah, and then Jesus predicts His suffering on the cross.

According to the Old Testament, Moses is the prototype of the Messiah, and Elijah is the forerunner of the Messiah. Remember whenever Jesus asks a crowd, who am I? Someone nearly always answers, Elijah. Anyway, they both now stand as witnesses as God reveals who Jesus truly is.

Only in Luke is their topic of conversation revealed as Jesus' Crucifixion; as well as the assumption that this incident happened at night.

Peter's proposal that they set up tents for them can be taken in a couple of ways. Perhaps he wanted to prolong the experience? One of my colleagues, whom I discuss the weekly scripture with, said, "Who wouldn't want to go camping with Jesus?" Maybe he just got flustered in front of such august company and said something silly. That is understandable. I met George Takai last summer and was so star struck I just babbled at him.

And throughout the Old Testament, the appearance of God is associated with a column of smoke or a cloud. Recall the Burning Bush and on Mount Sinai

with the Ten Commandments.

Leading up to this incident, a lot of assumptions were being made about Jesus, and here, Jesus' true nature is revealed. I started to think about how we make assumptions all the time, and how that reveals a lot about ourselves, and also how others are revealed through their assumptions.

I remembered a story I heard while watching the tv show, House. Gregory House told a story of when he was 14, he & a friend went rock climbing and his friend got hurt. They went to the hospital, and saw a janitor on the way in. When his friend came down with an infection, the doctors were stumped, and House was surprised to see the Janitor walk into the room. Surely that could wait, he thought. But then the Janitor examined the patient, diagnosed him, and set the treatment. It turned out that the janitor was a Buraku, his ancestors were butchers or grave diggers, so they were considered untouchables. Because of that, the hospital administrators and staff ignored him and assumed that he did not have anything to contribute, that he was worthless. Until they were stumped and needed him, and he turned out to be the smartest one there.

But that is a story in a work of fiction made up to fit a plotline. I remember that during my second tour of service in AmeriCorps, there was little turnover from one year to the next, and one of those who did, happened to be a friend named Angela, who lived the closest to me and was assigned to the same stations as I was. We spent ever weekday together for two years, and I was the photographer at her wedding. So we were good friends and were comfortable in each others' presence.

One day during a professional development day at our headquarters, the two of us headed across the street to get some Chinese take out for lunch. We had both been there before, either separately or with a group, but that was the first time where it was just the two of us. I noticed that a lot of the other patrons there were giving us dirty looks. This is new, I thought. We received our orders and left.

Angela noticed the look on my face, and said, "You saw that too? That hasn't

happened to me in awhile, and I forgot what that was like.” I asked her, “What was that all about?” She replied, “Well, I'm black, and you're white, and they were probably assuming that we are a couple.” My response was shock and some other uncharitable thoughts. They did not have any facts and just made an assumption, and reacted offensively towards us.

Peter had assumed that Jesus is the Messiah, and it was revealed that he was correct, revealing his anticipation of the Coming of the Messiah. Those people in that restaurant, assuming that my friend & I were a couple and giving us dirty looks revealed themselves to be racists. Our assumptions reveal a lot about our true natures. Positive or negative. It's what we think and what we see when we look at something. Are our assumptions positive? Or are they negative? My father told me to always start with the positive, not the negative, because it is better to be wrong that way, and if you are negative first, it is hard to switch to the positive, and to repair the damage caused. We need patience, not to be quick to judge others, because we don't know what is really happening with other people. So, we should ask ourselves: How do our assumptions reveal our true natures?

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

O God, You revealed to Your disciples on that mountaintop the true nature of Your son, Jesus. Grant us the faith in His Light that we may be strengthened to face whatever comes in our lives. And help us with the patience we need in our lives, to be careful with our assumptions. Help us to stay positive in all that we do. We pray, that as we reveal our true natures to others, that they be acceptable to You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

O God, We give you thanks for all the blessings and gifts you have given us, for those you have led into our lives and for moving us into the lives of others. And we thank you for using us as instruments of your divine love for us all.

We pray for the forgiveness of sins known and unknown, for falling short of how we should be towards ourselves, towards our fellow humans, and to all of Your Creation. May we reassured of Your forgiveness, so we may try to do better and make amends as we move forward.

We pray for everyone who needs Your help. For those who are unwell or wounded in mind, body, or spirit. We pray to be of assistance if we can, and for all those who have dedicated their lives to helping others. We pray to bring comfort to the lonely, shelter to the exposed and vulnerable, and nourishment to the hungry. May you fortify us to better serve you through our service to our neighbors.

We pray for ourselves. We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, to live up to the standard Jesus set for us. We pray that we recognize your messengers and those You send to help us and redirect us for who they are, and that we show the wisdom to heed them.

We especially pray for:

Gracious God, we offer these prayers and all those of our hearts up to you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Psalm 99

99:1 The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

99:2 The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.

99:3 Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he!

99:4 Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

99:5 Extol the LORD our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!

99:6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called on his name. They cried to the LORD, and he answered them.

99:7 He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees, and the statutes that he gave them.

99:8 O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

99:9 Extol the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy.

Luke 9:28-36

9:28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" -- not knowing what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.