

GOD IS NOT INVISIBLE

Holy God, you are the one who transfigures lives: take us beyond the minds that we have to find our true selves in you, loving and welcoming your goodness and your glory in Jesus Christ our Lord.

From Additional Collects, Common Worship, The Church of England

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
2 KINGS 2:1-1, PSALM 50:1-6, 2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6, MARK 9:2-9
FEBRUARY 11, 2018

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MARK 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

This year, as I began my reflection on this story of the transfiguration of Jesus in blazing light (the story we have every year on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent), I recalled the "shining city on a hill" image, most associated with President Ronald Reagan, but used in public discourse from its origin, in a sermon by Puritan leader John Winthrop in Massachusetts Bay in 1630 through remarks by former FBI director

James Comey before the Senate Intelligence Committee last year.

President Reagan summarized his use of the phrase in a farewell address to the nation in 1989. He said: "I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that

hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still.”

The phrase comes from Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5:14-16. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

So before there is a shining city, there are shining people.

You are the light of the world.

The transfiguration of Jesus was not a moment for Jesus to be impressive, neither in his own changed appearance, nor in his conversation with Moses and Elijah, nor in the voice from heaven. The experience was not one to be captured and held, nor attributed to Jesus as a personal attribute.

And the Voice was a voice to us, telling us to pay attention.

As in all that Jesus did, he revealed the potential of whole human beings, of all people living in relationship with the fullness of God.

So the point was not a shining Jesus, but a shining humanity that is God's dream and hope for every person, for each and all of us. Jesus shows that God shines in people, revealing the sacred, letting us experience the divine, who is loving, creative, energetic, full of hope, humor, generosity, possibility, endurance, patience, optimistic, committed, reliable, consistent....

Today we are recognizing with gratitude two people who have been radiating light here at St. Mark's-in-the-Valley for the past 25 years: Oscar and Maria Andrade. And they have radiated here all of the qualities I just named. Oscar and Maria have been essential to literally every aspect of the life of this faith community, every worship service, every program, every event, every visit by any person on any day, every class, every service project, tangibly supporting and making functional a hospitable, useful and useable, open place for those who are here often and for the person who will set foot on this campus for the first time today. For 25 years they have created order from chaos and confusion, suffered fools gladly – literally infusing this place with resilience and joy.

But the story doesn't stop there. At the same time, Oscar and Maria have been making this country and this community better

places to live, to work, to go to school, to serve others, to raise families, to celebrate holidays and birthdays and anniversaries – as they have recently celebrated their 47th.

Their enormous legacy here at St. Mark's is dwarfed by their large and impressive family, their sons, their daughters-in-law and their grandchildren who, like Oscar and Maria, are lighting up this their local community, in business, in teaching, and in community service, lighting up and immeasurably enriching this their country.

They are the literal embodiment of that vision articulated by President Ronald Reagan. They embody the words of Jesus: light of the world. Or to use the phrase from Thomas Merton I quoted last week, they are “walking around shining like the sun....”

They help us recognize the full message of the transfiguration, that *seemingly* rare event on a mountain, millennia ago: that God is anything but invisible.

We recognize and thank Oscar and Maria today, not that they need it or want it, partially to recognize that our own integrity as

a faith community calls for it, but to enter the awareness, to heighten our consciousness that our lives are interwoven.

All that exists is a gift of God: all of creation and each human being and the particular skills, expertise, energy, abilities, physical capabilities, insights, intelligence, and commitments we embody from moment to moment. All of this is God's light in the world, the new and renewing creation, love and compassion of God and God's abiding and undying self-expression in every child, woman and man.

Yes, God is anything but invisible.

And through all we see, God is calling us, while equipping us, for an ever-expanding consciousness.

Beginning with what we can see.

Jesus transfigured on the mountain.

Each person, Oscar, Maria, their family, each of us and all of us together: light of the world.

Every person revealing the light of the holy mountain in their own particular lives interwoven with ours – every person walking around shining like the sun.



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