

Sermon: Hidden Power  
Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B  
Mark 9:2-9

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Last Sunday Tidge Roller told a few of us how there are flowers popping up in her yard right now. The Rollers have Snow Drops, an alpin flower, and Halibores, a.k.a. Lenten Roses, beginning to bloom underneath the hand- like brown leaves, that protect the flowers like umbrellas. Yes, under the snow, the ice and sometimes bitter cold days, there are signs of life! Does that strike any of you as good news? With the leaves still brown, the flowers would be easy to miss. So unless you really looked for them you might miss them altogether. But Tidge saw them and shared that hopeful image with us. This image reminded me of a song our children sang one spring in church, written by Natalie Sleeth:

*In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed an apple tree, in cocoons a hidden promise butterflies will soon be free; in the cold and snow of winter, there a spring's that waits to be, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.*

Something God alone can see. God's hidden power is a mysterious thing! There is so much going on around and within us all the time that we can't see, that we can't hear, that we can't sense, that we can't imagine or articulate. But it's there. In today's Gospel passage from Mark, we get a glimpse into God's glory, God's mysterious power through the story known as the Transfiguration.

Jesus and his inner circle, Peter, James, and John, are on the mountain. If you recall other Bible stories that take place on mountains, who pops up in your head but Moses and Elijah? Remember Moses received the Ten Commandments on the smoky and fiery mountain top and Elijah's encounter of God thru a still, small voice helped see him through some difficult tasks which lay ahead. And now Elijah and Moses appear in this story, too. There are reasons for the phrase "Mountain top experience" being used as a powerful and wondrous thing. It is on the mountains where the Divine and human touch, where people connect with God in a special way, and get a glimpse into the mystery.

Jesus was transfigured before this assorted group of men. What does that even mean? His clothes turned a dazzling white that was beyond any white that any human could have bleached them. Some aspect of Jesus' being was revealed to them, something that normally God alone could see. There in that holy moment past, present and future all came together. Jesus' hidden power was made manifest to Peter, James and John for a reason. If Jesus' appearance didn't give them the clue, then maybe the voice that came from the cloud made it clear to them, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

God revealed something previously hidden to these disciples of Jesus, something that would enliven their faith for the moment, but also that would help them in the days to come. This encounter may have been what helped them face some difficult tasks ahead, including the suffering and death of their beloved Jesus, but also gave them a glimpse into God's power, that helped them trust there would be more to the story, that Jesus's death would not end there. Eternal love, palpable in that holy moment, would provide the strength and love they needed to fulfill their mission.

Notice that while the disciples are privileged to get a glimpse of this divine manifestation of Jesus, they still don't grasp the totality of what God is doing. Peter responds, "Let's make three dwellings for you and Moses and Elijah, Jesus." He so wants the moment to last! And why wouldn't he! Why not try to extend this amazing, holy moment? Don't we all want that? An extended moment with God, to dwell in that palpable power, the power of love and justice and peace?

There is God given- power hidden within each of us. We see power used for ill and power used for good. Just in this week's newspapers we've read of stories of trusted individuals abusing their power over vulnerable children, that makes us sick. We've seen our legislators wielding political power as they work out our national budget, for good and/or for ill, depending on how you look at it. Some have institutional power, such as elected officials, teachers, police officers or even clergy. But there is another type of power that each of us possesses by virtue of our birth. This is the hidden power of God. God given- power hidden deep within us can be called forth from God to further God's kingdom, to fulfill the mission of God. And what is God's mission but for all people to be reconciled with God and with one another.

We have this beautiful opportunity before us to use our hidden power for good. Our national church, our diocese, and our little parish family are all participating in the healing work of God through an effort of reconciling the racial divide in this country and in our own community. This past fall and early winter our diocese sponsored talks in various parts of the diocese that focused on racial reconciliation, looking specifically at the systemic racism that exists in our communities. The national church has given us a tool called "Beloved Community" that helps us examine the reality of our racist past and where we are making progress and how we might have hope for change. Emmanuel, along with Trinity and Allen Chapel A.M.E. Churches will soon be sharing our own stories on race, stories of the Beloved Community, on Wednesday nights during lent. This term "Beloved Community" has its roots in Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy.

King said, "The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposites into friends. The type of love I stress here is not eros, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not philia, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is agape which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization."

At Annual Convention two weekends back, our keynote speaker the Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers, who works for the national church, made some wonderful remarks about how to move forward in the endeavor of reconciliation. She said to ask questions and she said, "don't run when the questions get hot." She implored us to be humble and willing to learn; it takes practice. She said to tell the truth and keep trying, even when it seems labyrinthian. Keep walking toward God's Beloved Community no matter how awkward or painful it may be."

It's cold outside; it is winter. There is a lot of heartache out there in our world. But like Tidge's flowers reveal to us, there is something else going on out there as well. Like the disciples in today's story we don't always grasp the totality of what God is doing. But God is up to something good. And it may be through you.

Will you close your eyes and imagine yourself on the mountain top with Jesus, just the two of you? His light emanates, you see that divine light and you feel the warmth of that powerful love, the love that often seems hidden from you but is there all the same. What would Jesus reveal to you? How would he tell you to use your power, that hidden God given power of love within you? Now, will you listen to him?

Amen.