

**SERMON**  
**“Full Exposure: As Good As It Gets”**  
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**February 14, 2010**  
**St. John’s Chapel UCC**

2 Corinthians 3: 12--4: 2

When one turns to the Lord the veil is removed.

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another...

**Luke 9: 28-36**

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 weighted 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.

Here ends the reading from Holy Scripture.

## SERMON

What I would like for Valentine's today? I would like for my husband to fully expose himself to me, not a physical exposure, but a spiritual one—that level of intimacy would be the best Valentine's present ever. This is what Jesus is doing today for those closest to him. He is completely and fully exposing himself.

During this Epiphany time, Jesus has filled with the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. But all of this is occurring to him personally. “Earlier, at the baptism of Jesus, the voice from heaven had spoken to Jesus alone: ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”<sup>1</sup> The day he walks from the wasteland of temptation, only we readers are privy to the fact that Jesus is now full of the power of the Holy Spirit. His identity has yet been fully exposed to others.

Yes, there are things happening that seem to indicate there is something really, really special about this man. Jesus has been patiently teaching his disciples, and they are amazed, awed by the words coming out of his mouth. They are also just a little baffled. He tries to explain to them the nature of the reign of God through parables. These stories he weaves with the point and everyday events. He does not use big, complicated words. He keeps it simple, but rarely do these help them understand more clearly. Yet, what he's saying **gets them**, for they keep on following him.

There was this man who had an aunt, who was certainly no theologian, but every time that the theologian, Paul Tillich spoke in the vicinity of Cambridge, Massachusetts, his aunt went to hear Tillich lecture. She sat there transfixed by the German theologian's remarks. Someone asked the man if she was able to understand what Tillich was talking about.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX*, Alan Culpepper, p.207.

“Are you kidding? My aunt never understood a word of what he was talking about. But she said that she loved listening to him because she knew that whatever it was he was talking about, it was very, very important.”<sup>2</sup> **She did not get it, but the words he spoke got her.**

The disciples were transfixed by Jesus, but the parables or even the miracles did not remove for them the veil of unknowing. Sometimes, they just seemed to confuse them all the more. Peter does correctly confess when asked, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter replies, “The Messiah of God!” Yet, he’s far from understanding what that confession means.

So Jesus takes Peter, John and James up a mountain to pray. There he does not try to teach or explain anything to them. Instead he allows them to see his glory. Moses and Elijah appear in glory, Luke tells us. Later the disciples saw Jesus’ glory. Luke is the only gospel writer who has these references to glory in the telling of the Transfiguration. Why does Luke do this? And what is glory? Would I know it if I saw it?

Deb Hall, our secretary—who is a photographer, tells me that when photographers talk of full exposure; they are talking about the perfect balance of light that lets that being photographed explain itself most clearly. Or it is the balance of light that allows the photographer to show us what they want us to see?

Glory, represented by a halo or a circle of light in art, shows us the radiance, the light of God’s presence in a person, the holiness of the person. It is the balance of light used by God to show us what God wants us to see. When God, through Christ, cannot get to us through words, parables, or even miracles—we, with Jesus, are taken to the mountain of full disclosure.

One of my professors, after I had tried to explain my call into ministry said to me, “Becky, God had to grab you by the nape of your hair to get your attention.” And she was right. God had tried all kinds of other means to get the message across, but I was either not listening or

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, “Blessed Befuddlement,” p.32.

too thick headed for it to get through. So eventually God had to do a full exposure, or what is usually called a mystical experience, in order for me to get it.

I was sitting in an ordinary chair, in an ordinary office, carrying on a very ordinary conversation when it happened. It was as if I had been transported, yet I was still in the same office, sitting in the same chair. But I had merged with the chair, because I was the chair and the chair was me. I remember trying to make contact with the arm of the chair, but couldn't because I was the chair. When I stood to walk I couldn't make contact with the floor, for I was the floor. And I could go on with a list, for in essence, I had become one with the universe. It would be 2 to 3 years before someone would explained to me that I was having a mystical experience; God was exposing God's glory to me. The phenomenal thing was what I knew from the experience. First and foremost, I knew the splendor and radiant beauty of ONENESS, of the interconnectedness of everything. I knew that God wanted me to become a minister. I knew that much of what I knew before was just a bunch of hogwash.

These things I knew, I had not learned through the use of my senses: through sight, sound, touch, smell or taste. I knew at a level that transcends normal knowing. And let me tell you, when you know something that transcends normal, knowing it is hard to put into words.

But I will try!

People go to art galleries and usually stand there before the picture trying to take it all in. Some of you stand before it longer than others. Not because you are trying to get it, but because it has got you. It's showing you its glory. And you walk away with a knowing you did not have before. Art works as a good mirror into the soul of God.

The Transfiguration is about this kind of knowing. It is about us going along living life...thinking about Jesus every so often. Maybe we think of him as a wonderful teacher, or

inspiring moral example, a good guide along life's way and all the other rather ordinary, rather ho-hum ways we think about Jesus. And that's okay, as far as it goes.

But sometimes Jesus takes us to another level. Sometimes he leads us beyond our answers, rules, and certainties. It often happens when we think our faith makes perfectly good sense, that it all clicks together right fine, then Jesus takes our hand and leads us into another realm—God's realm. He fully exposes himself to us. He shines before us the mysterious and the wonderful that's beyond our ability to comprehend or explain. He lets us see his glory, his holiness, the presence of God with which he is filled.

And that my friends, is when being a disciple of Jesus is **about as good as it gets**. And we exclaim, as those first disciples exclaimed on the mountaintop, "Lord! It's good we are here!"

Peter said, that day standing on that mountain top, "Let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." I've have always taken this to mean "poor Peter doesn't get it again." Now, I'm wondering.

Luke says Peter didn't know what he was saying. He was out of his head. He was talking nonsense. Well, maybe that's because he was not in his head. He had moved beyond intellectual knowing and entered the realm of the mystical.

We, UCC'ers, have often been referred to as "heady," because we are perceived as operating from our heads more than our emotions. The Congregationalist branch of our denomination founded the first college in America, Harvard College. Both branches, Congregational Christians and Evangelical Reform, lay claim to some of the greatest thinkers. Due to the Great Awakening of 1734—when revivalists would stir people into an emotional state, our forefather taught that thought is religion's best weapon, and religion is thought's best

inspiration. So we tend to be more than just a little suspicious of anything that takes us outside intellectual knowing.

Well, maybe the Transformation is trying to tell us that when we are no longer “in our heads,” when we are “out of our minds”, that that’s **about as good as it gets**. We have sailed beyond mere thinking and rational thought. We are in ecstasy. We are in another realm with God, with an exotic, mysterious mystery that excites and defies explanations. We may not be able to fully comprehend or explain him, but in that moment of full exposure—we may not get him, but he gets us. And we understand, not with our senses, but at a deeper level, that we are to not only expose our shame for healing but the glory that resides in us—that we may know as we are known.

“The mystery of God is not a problem to be solved, a question to be answered, but rather a relationship to be enjoyed.”<sup>3</sup> And when you get right down to it, isn’t that what we all want for Valentine’s. Full exposure...that gets us! Ecstasy! Isn’t that about as good as it gets?

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 29.