

A Dazzling Light
Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
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Luke 9:28-45

Most of us, I suspect, at some point each day, look in a mirror. We check our hair, our makeup, our teeth, our clothes. Mirrors show us what we look like. But while it might be important to know what we look like, it's more important to know who we are.

At a recent PF meeting, the high schoolers played a sort of Jeopardy game in which they quizzed each other on the traditions of the group. And guess what? One of the questions asked how many times in 2020 I changed the color of my hair! That made me giggle.¹

What is it about getting a new look like I like so much? Think about the kind of new look that you or someone you know has recently gotten, or maybe one that you want to try out. You don't have to tell me what it was, just think about it. If you've taken the plunge and went for a new look, what have people said about it? How have they reacted?

Have you ever had the experience of someone telling you, "*I like how you USED to look*"? Oops. Maybe they didn't mean to say it to you quite that way and it just slipped out. Or maybe, like me, you have some really blunt friends and family members.

I think when I get that kind of response, it's kind of hilarious. It reminds me that however excited I am about my new look, there are those around me that have decided some things should remain unchanged or go back the way they were. And I'd do well to remember that.

In many ways, we can be a people who want new energy, new passion, new life, without really ever having to change a thing! Well, let me tell you about three people in the Bible who changed. They got a new look.

First there's Moses, one of the characters in today's reading. His story begins as a baby in a basket floating in a river. He flees Egypt as a young man after killing a guard, turns into Charlton Heston out in the desert. Then he meets with God, there's a burning bush that tells him to lead the Hebrew people

¹ In 2020, I had 4 distinct hair colors: Grey, burgundy, dark purple and rose gold.

out of bondage in Egypt. He goes up the mountain, into the God cloud. And when he comes back down with the 10 commandments, his face is glowing. The people, predictably, react with fear – it's not every day that something like that happens without CGI technology! They believe that he was glowing because he had been in God's presence. So Moses hid his face from them with a veil, except just after he came down the mountain he'd show his face to prove where he'd been. But then soon after, he'd cover it up again to keep people from being afraid.

Other people have said that he covered up because they might notice that the glow faded after a while. Moses covered up the fading light because he didn't want the people to lose trust in him.

At any rate, Moses' look changed, and the people said this is from God.

There's another person. Closely related to Moses, it's Moses sister, Miriam. Miriam was the one that arrived just after the pharaoh's daughter had drawn him out of the water. She raised him really. Later on, she became a prophetess, the one who led the Hebrew people in song after they've been delivered from the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

In Numbers, chapter 12, we hear that Miriam also went up into the God Cloud². The circumstances were a little different. She was in the cloud after criticizing Moses for marrying a person she didn't approve of. And once she left the cloud, her skin was glowing. The Bible says that her skin was not glowing with power as Moses' had, but rather, a skin disease. Miriam asked for forgiveness. And then after a week her skin had returned to normal.

Miriam changed, she got a new look from God.

Let's shift to our reading today. Jesus transfigured. Jesus took Peter, John and James up the mountain to pray, and when they were there two more people arrived - Moses and Elijah. Afterward, Jesus' face and his clothes were glowing. God lets everyone know, just in case they were confused, that Jesus was the one.

Peter, maybe he was just sleepy or he didn't quite know what to say, but his first reaction was to provide hospitality. He suggested they put up three dwellings for Jesus and his friends. But they didn't, because they all had to get back to work. When they left the mountain, they didn't speak to each other about it.

² Numbers 12:1-10

Jesus changed and got a new look. And Peter was bewildered, then silent.

We see some very different reactions through all these changes that Moses, Miriam and Jesus went through: fear and awe, disdain and repulsion, bewilderment and silence.

Maybe that's because people react to transformation differently.

There are some changes we do for ourselves, in order to feel better. I don't think there's anything wrong with us wanting to look, feel or live better. But I do think something wrong with our cultural obsession with perfection.

So I think we have to be mindful that our desire to change (or to not change) isn't born out of selfish reasons. That it doesn't come from a place of fear, distain or bewilderment.

Transformation isn't just about us doing better - It's about what God is doing continuously. It's about how God is shaping and guiding us. It's about recognizing God's love and sharing it with everyone.

That's what we're about here at MCC, knowing that God is continually doing a new thing. God is shaping us and guiding us, recognizing that God loves us and that our job is sharing that love with everyone.

Antonio Stradivarius was a poor Italian violin maker who lived from 1644 to 1737. It is estimated that Stradivarius produced 1,116 stringed instruments, of which about 450 to 512 violins are in existence today. Each are worth, in today's money, over several million dollars. The reason these instruments are so valuable is because of the rich and resonating sound that they produce.

What is more surprising is that these violins were not made from treasured pieces of wood, but from discarded lumber found in a nearby harbor. Stradivarius took those waterlogged pieces of wood to his shop where he cleaned them up and made precious instruments regarded as the pinnacle of his craft.

And just as that poor violin maker transformed discarded wood into treasures, I believe that God desires to transform each one of us into the treasured image of his Beloved.

This week we're going to be in God's presence, because there's nowhere that we can go that we aren't in God's presence. We probably won't start glowing... probably.

But I think we're going to see opportunities to live into the way that God is changing us, anyway. In my life, in your life, in the life of our congregation, collectively be assured that God is active and God is working. We get to trust, follow and let God lead as God changes us.

We are about to enter the 40-day season of Lent, which mirrors Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness. The wilderness can be a place for transformation, where we come face-to-face with our truest selves. Perhaps rather than see this time as a period of penitence, we can see Lent as a transformative journey into new beginnings, a time of metamorphosis, of deep growth, of being within the chrysalis, ready to emerge renewed.

I invite you to open yourself to transformation as we complete this season of Epiphany and walk together into the season of Lent.

May you be transformed in the midst of your life, knowing that new beginnings are possible.

May you see change as an opportunity instead of a threat.

May you be blessed as you uncover new truths about yourself.

May you know that you are journeying with companions through this wilderness. Amen.