

*“My Way or the High Way”*  
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Transfiguration Sunday, February 26, 2017  
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Holy Scriptures: 2 Peter 2: 16-18    Matthew 17: 1-9

**Matthew 17:1-9**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

**2 Peter 1:16-18**

*Eyewitnesses of Christ's Glory*

<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup> For he received honor and glory from God the [Creator] when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." <sup>18</sup> We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

***Call and Response, God's and Our Own***

One day I was with a small group of clergy swapping and sharing pulpit stories.  
So we got to talking about call and response,  
    the dynamic of pulpit and pew connections,  
        when the sermon is transformed from a monologue to a dialogue,  
            from a speech to a conversation,  
                from a treatise to a testimonial,  
                    from a singular soliloquy into sacred synergy.  
One of us in the clergy group was an Anglo preacher from a suburban church.

He said he had just returned from preaching in Memphis,  
at a primarily African American church;  
he said the folks really got into his message;  
he marveled at the report he had with the congregation,  
as exemplified by their shared call and response.  
Two clergy who were familiar with call and response pressed my friend for more info.  
Exactly what were the people saying to him while he preached?  
“Oh, my,” he said, “*they were really into it!*  
*They kept shouting ‘Help him, Lord, help him!’”*

### ***Call and Response, God’s and Our Own***

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter we read:  
“...we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.  
For he received honor and glory from God the [Creator]  
when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory,  
saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”  
We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven,  
while we were with him on the holy mountain.”

The disciples of Jesus who were with Him on the mountaintop heard God’s voice.  
They saw the majesty of God revealed and they were in awe.  
They departed that holy space and went forth to embody a Higher Love.  
Followers of God chose to proclaim, to preach, to practice, to present themselves as  
living sacrifices for the common good.  
Those who were not on the mountaintop heard the story, and took it to heart.  
They opened themselves up to receive the same glory, the same grace, same greatness.  
They dwelled on the Word and took it in so deeply it was as if they were all on the  
mountaintop.  
We ourselves were there.  
We, too, heard the Word.  
We, too, responded to God’s call.

The echoes of that Word reach our hearts this day.  
The light and shadows of the transfiguration of Christ bedazzle us today.  
The meaning and significance are not lost on us; we are fertile soil, rich, deep, ready.

God calls and we respond.  
Pure and simple.  
That’s the way of the Word.

The Lord asks, “*Who will be my eyewitness?*”  
We, who have beheld God’s majesty in nature and nurture, respond.  
We call this amplification.

The Lord wonders, “*Who will testify?*”  
We, who have been to the mountaintop and seen God’s glory, give voice to our faith.  
We call this communication.

The Lord queries, “*Who shall be my hands and feet?*”

We, who have personally experienced the presence of God  
in times good and ill, in the darkness and in dawn's early light,  
know the value of being holy with some skin on it.  
We call this incarnation.

The Lord says, *"Who will sing my praises?"*  
We, who have been broken, fragmented & shredded,  
rejoice at being recreated, reoriented, reformed & renewed.  
We call this resurrection.

The Lord says, *"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"*  
WE, says the Creator, the Son and the Holy Spirit, need someone to respond!  
*WHO will go for us?*  
*Who will go for US?*  
The collective WE - One God, Three Personas - has a need of at least one soul to say yes.  
We call this commission.

Somebody say yes.  
Say yes to a Higher Love.  
Say yes to following the Highest Standards of Living, of Loving, of Life.  
Say yes, and through you God will make a divine difference.  
We call this sanctification.

### ***Call and Response, God's and Our Own***

*"...that voice was conveyed to [Jesus] by the Majestic Glory,  
saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."  
We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven,  
while we were with him on the holy mountain."*

After God spoke, Jesus went down the mountain and began to heal a child.  
And after that He set His face toward Jerusalem, to the awaiting cross.  
This is the High Way; it is the standard set before us on how to love, to serve, to be.

After the call comes our response, and after that comes the messy work of ministry.  
God will provide the means, the motive, the gifts and genius.  
There is no promise of a rose garden; there is simply the Promise.  
*"I will be your God, and you will be my people."*  
*"These are my children, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*  
Our part in the process of faith personified  
is to step up to the plate, to participate, to share and to unite to serve.

### ***Call and Response, God's and Our Own***

So often our response to God's call is conditional.  
Does this sound similar to you, that we communicate in thought, word or deed:  
*"I will say yes to the One Who Created and Creates,  
but it's gotta be my way."*

We behave and believe as if the world is a mirror,  
a self-designed, self-glorifying mirror  
reflecting back to us what we want to see, to perceive, to believe.

Each Narcissus flower leans over the surrounding pond  
as if to ponder and admire its own reflection.  
Each flower is quite a lovely sight to behold.  
Even though the Narcissus is in a vast forest and surrounded by beauty,  
the Narcissus world view is quite small, confined, self-centered,  
limited by a laser sharp focus on itself.  
This morning we might learn something from Mother Nature.

When all we see is what we choose to see, it makes it kind of hard to see anyone else as they truly are.  
When all we believe is what we have chosen to accept as truth,  
then it's hard to receive new and different insights, truths, and understandings.  
When all we receive we claim as our own,  
as if made from our own creative powers,  
then it is that much tougher  
to accept them as gifts from the Creator  
to be used for God's glory.

One of the greatest challenges we face – we meaning you and I and all of us together --  
in this day and age and culture of narcissism  
is that we want, we need, we insist on doing everything “my way”.

*“I've lived a life that's full  
I've traveled each and every highway  
But more, much more than this  
I did it my way” (My Way by Frank Sinatra)*

Great song, Frank, and a terrific way to send home the fans from Yankee Stadium.  
Baseball, however, is a team sport,  
one that requires all 25 players to pull together, support one another,  
cheer on and sacrifice and back up each other.  
Players step up to the plate by using their gifts and talents and camaraderie.  
As they say, there is no “I” in “Team”.  
Unless you were watching *The Tonight Show* this week.  
Host Jimmy Fallon read some tweets submitted in response to his Hashtag,  
“If I won the Power Ball lottery.”

One response was:

*“I'd pay to have the spelling of TEAM changed to TEIAM,  
to make coaches everywhere look stupid.”*

Okay, okay, just one more response:

*“I would hire someone to explain the plot of every show and movie  
to my mom so she can stop asking.”*

## **Call and Response, God's and Our Own**

The disciples were "...eyewitnesses of his majesty."

You know what?

God is an eyewitness of your own greatness, your gifts, your awesomeness.  
Don't be shy; let your little light shine.

At his 1994 inauguration speech,  
the late President Nelson Mandela quoted Marianne Williamson, saying:  
*"Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate,  
but that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us.  
We ask ourselves,  
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God."*

In his book Waking the Dead, John Eldredge  
also speaks of our fear that we are powerful beyond measure;  
he describes it as fearing our own glory as beings made in the image of God.  
*"We do fear our glory."* Eldredge writes,  
*"The...reason we fear our own glory is that once we let others see it,  
they will have seen the truest us, and that is nakedness indeed.  
We can repent of our sin.  
We can work on our "issues."  
But there is nothing to be done about our glory.  
It is an awkward thing to shimmer when everyone else around you is not,  
to walk in your glory with an unveiled face  
when everyone else is veiling his [or her] face.  
"And that is why living from your glory is the only loving thing to do.  
You cannot love another person from a false self.  
You cannot love another while you are still hiding.  
How can you help them to freedom while you remain captive?"*  
(John Eldredge. Waking the Dead. Page 87-88)

So let's flip this around into a positive, life-affirming message:  
Love one another from your true Self.  
Love one another with a sense of wonder and awe.  
Love one another from glory into glory.

## **Call and Response, God's and Our Own**

And now we have come full circle,  
from hearing God's Word and call  
to being encouraged to respond in kind;  
from recognizing the value and vigor of a life lived along God's High Way  
to our cultural preferences for doing everything my way;  
from feeling a wee bit afraid or shy or hesitant to light our lights shine  
to daring to bedazzle and transfigure just like Jesus on the mountaintop.

There is one more obstacle to hurdle, and this is one we can only leap over together.

We live in a day and age when we are raising generations  
to be “affirmation junkies,” and we have no one to blame but ourselves.

We hand out trophies for showing up.

We only feel appreciated when we huddle with like-minded groups;  
we polarize ourselves from those whose ideas differ from our own.

We get all warm and fuzzy  
when friends and strangers click on Like.

Well, my friends, God isn't about to start clicking on Like  
just so you can feel good.  
Lord knows, what the world needs now is not more Like.

What the world needs now is love.  
As Stevie Wonder sang, “*Love is in need of love today.*”

Whether or not you feel as if you are an eyewitness of God's majesty,  
either in nature or nurture,  
if you don't love yourself  
you won't love anyone else.

The Lord is calling us to Love:  
love God; love one another; love yourself.

So each and every time God calls us to love  
the button that gets pushed doesn't read Like;  
it says Send.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

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