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Transfiguration, Year A
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They are ambassadors from another time.

John Steinbeck wrote "The redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always. They are not like any trees we know, they are ambassadors from another time."

It's an image, a scene, sight and sound that will stay with me during these late winter days. Traversing the weather rollercoaster with multiple false springs. It will sustain me through most of Lent. Keep me moving forward. I'm going to hold it in my heart as I walk step by step.

The pop of the ball as it hits the glove. The crack of the bat. It can only mean one thing. Pitchers and catchers have reported. That proclaims to me that spring will come in all of its glory. That tomorrow will be different from today. Not redwoods, but the redbirds.

There are others. I can go on a pilgrimage in my heart and be back there in an instant. Moments that are still so vivid after all these years. An image, a scene, sight, conversation, and sound. Just the act of recalling them can be what I need to press on. Maybe it is connected to a place. A tree, a prairie, a lake, a community, a campfire, a location where you grew up into your identity/calling.

It could have been an episode that transpired in the most ordinary of ways. You forgot about the interaction for years. Out of the blue a coach, a teacher, a loved one, a friend, a stranger, came and put their hand on your shoulder and looked you in the eye. When they spoke it was like their words were building a new world for you to step into. Their belief in you, affirmation, encouragement, curiosity, cleared away rubble in your heart so you could move forward. These conversations happen in this space on a regular basis and we are all better for it.

It's central to any call story. The confirmation from someone else that you are who you are supposed to be and doing what you are supposed to be doing. Every baptized person has countless callings and vocations and they continue to the end.

It's still kind of a mystery- but it was almost like you were *transfigured*.

This strange section of the gospel is beautiful and bewildering. Much of the church (think episcopalians and Roman Catholics) celebrate Transfiguration on August 6th. Lutherans and some protestants have decided to move it to the Sunday before Lent. I think there is wisdom

there- because transfiguration is about callings and identity; Jesus' and our own-- that propel us out into the wild/world/down the mountain.

Up on the mountain Jesus is shining brightly as the Triune God become flesh. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Elijah. Sent to dwell with us to demonstrate the full extent of this God's love and reach to all the least and lost. Almost as if the voice and the cloud both proclaim- "Jesus-- remember who you are and why you are here! Don't forget! And when you do, return to this moment in your sacred memory or sanctified imagination. Sometimes you've got to go back in order to move forward." Call it transfiguration, death and resurrection, but we know it is true.

Someone offered this perspective this week: What if this image not only sustained the disciples on the journey, but also Jesus himself? What if even Jesus came back to this moment in the midst of his life-- always moving toward the cross, and especially that sleepless night in the garden where he sweats drops of blood and pleads with his Abba that this cup pass from him. What if a voice resounded in his heart-- remember who you are and why you are here. Remember-- you have a calling!

"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased."

"This is my daughter, the beloved; with her I am well pleased."

"This is my child, the beloved; with them I am well pleased."

Do you hear the divine whisper in your ear? Amid the shouts it still subversively sings into your soul. Who helps you hear it when other sounds create a cacophony?

They fall to the ground overcome by fear. We've all been overwhelmed, overcome. When that happens our sense of self and call gets out of balance. Time gets wobbly. Maybe you have not been affirmed like you long for. Jesus comes all the way down and puts his hand on them. No matter where you are, Jesus will find his way to you and your flesh. No cloud is too thick that he will not find his way to you. This mountain leads to the other.

"They are ambassadors from another time."

What images, words, sustain you? The resistance of Minneapolis? The quiet knowing hug from a friend who sticks closer than a sibling? Word and touch.

Pick a moment and go back as many times as you need. Hold on. Push ahead. Sealed with the Holy Spirit. Marked with Christ's cross. Forgiven. Found. Named. Claimed. And called. Every single one of you.

In your own body. Beloved. This is a strategic planning question, but is also a deeply spiritual heart question. What would it look like for us, Grace, to use our words, resources, gifts to build a new world for others to step into-- and how are we already doing it.

There is an African Proverb about the Sankofa Bird. It is often depicted with feet facing forward and its beak pointing back- retrieving an egg from the past as it moves ahead. We are headed down countless mountains. It's why we are here. He touched them and said "get up and do not be afraid."