

Based on Mark 9:2-9. *Transfiguration as Inner Work*

A couple of years ago, one of our members here at SPC reached out to me with a historical question: what was the congregation doing in the days leading up to the Civil War?

The assumption was that we were actively engaged with the social justice issues of the day, in much the same way we try to be now.

It broke my heart to respond gently, but truthfully, that we were not. In fact, quite the opposite.

As the language printed in our bulletin insert of the motion passed by the SPC session in the mid-1800s lays out, this congregation stood intentionally in support of slavery, even as the national church began organizing against it.

That is hard to hear, and even harder to say, and even harder to imagine, as we find ourselves in our own unique historical moment. All of us want to be, as they say, on the right side of history.

Jesus, too, wants to be on the right side of history, as he turns his movement toward Jerusalem, knowing full well the horror that lies ahead. This will not be an easy journey, even as it remains an essential one.

Misunderstanding, at best, will confront him, as will outright betrayal and death, at worst.

In order for the movement to survive beyond that worst, Jesus knows it must be rooted in something eternal, something that can outlast the horror of the historical moment and sustain those who remain to keep a flicker of hope burning for the long haul.

This moment on the mountain with Peter and James and John gives Jesus that grounding, that view from eternity, that inner and outer transformation that strengthens him for the journey that lies ahead. God will be with him, as will the ancestors, as will the promise of resurrection.

In fact, we could argue the whole point of our Lesson today is that Jesus can do the outer work that is to come because he has done the inner work of transfiguration. Alongside Moses and Elijah, Jesus knows who he has come from. Alongside Peter and James and John, Jesus knows who he is. Alongside the voice that calls him Beloved, Jesus knows who he is becoming. As do we all.

For us, here at SPC, the Season of Lent will be an invitation to do our own inner work as a congregation. On five consecutive Sundays, beginning next Sunday, our Social Justice Committee will present an inside look at SPC through the study and transcription of Session minutes from 1814-1900. We will learn what was on Session's minds during those years of war and unrest and, perhaps more importantly, what they chose NOT to mention.

We will hear from some of Shepherd University's history scholars about what might have been roiling outside the church, from experts on the Colonization Movement in Shepherdstown and the Executive Director of the Presbyterian Historical Society on what was going on with the national Presbyterian church during those years.

One member of our Worship Planning Team for the Season of Lent describes this inner work, in some ways, as a terrible story that needs to be told. And that is most certainly true. But if we just leave it there, we will have missed the point.

We do this inner work as a congregation, we tell this terrible story as a people, not to make ourselves feel bad or, alternatively, to pat ourselves on the back for not being that way anymore. We do this inner work as a congregation for the same reason any of us do inner work for ourselves. Because God wants us to be well, and we want to be well, too.

The inner work allows us to let go of perfectionism and hold onto grace. The inner work allows us to place our hope in the healing power of love that is from everlasting to everlasting. The inner work allows us to trust the promise that God really is working over time through all time to transform all things for the good, for those who love God and are called to God's purpose.

Which is us.