

“The beauty underneath”

- 13 years ago, Katy and I moved out of seminary and into our first rectory
 - I was thinking about that first move after ordination last week when the youth group were doing a stay-at-home mission trip
 - Giving this rectory garage a make over, and boy did they do a great job!
 - But back in 09, we had for three years in seminary lived in a tiny, two bedroom, cinder-block apartment they called married housing
 - We showed up in Arkansas to a big 3 bedroom house with two living rooms, two dining rooms, a real closet, and even a basement.
 - And there were rooms that were literally empty after we had completely unpacked.
 - But it did not stay like that for long.
 - This house was a fixer-upper, that is for sure, but it was so much more house than we had been living in- it was such an improvement
 - One of the many projects there was this great big hearth and dual sided fireplace
 - And on one side, the living room side, the brick had all been painted to match the walls.
 - Now this house had beautiful brick- deep red with black in it, and we wanted to have that color back in our living room
 - This was 11 years ago, facebook recently reminded me, when we decided to try and remove the paint
 - It was not simple, or easy.
 - We could not sand blast it because it was interior brick and sand would go everywhere
 - We could not use dangerous chemicals, because Katy was pregnant with Gaius and toxic fumes are particularly dangerous
 - So.... we bought safe, citrus-based paint remover gel, which helped a little
 - A lot of wire brushes and handheld sanders.

- And we got to work- removing not just one layer, but at least 3 layers of paint, the bottom layer probably a seal of some kind
- It was so much more of a project than we realized- it sort of became the marker of progress through the pregnancy
- The closer we got to the birth, the more natural brick appeared
- Finally, after much scraping and sanding, giving up and recommitting, we finished- it took near 6 months
- And it was just what we hoped- the same beautiful brick underneath all of that paint
- We had only unveiled it to so speak, restoring it to what it was made to be, its original beauty
- That is a lot like today- Moses, Jesus, and even some Baptisms
- This morning, we are celebrating the feast of the Transfiguration
 - And are taking the opportunity to baptize two new members into God's family, represented by you and me right here
 - It is a chance for us to be a church, a community of faith, and fulfill one of our most sacred obligations
 - That is to promise to uphold everyone who passes through these holy waters
 - And for each of us to remember and renew what it is that we are supposed to be focused on
 - What is important, right?
 - These baptismal vows are heard and repeated so often that I think we are tempted to let them roll off the tongue too quickly
 - They are much more important than that
 - If you ever get asked: what does the Episcopal church believe? And what does God want from us?
 - Here is your answer: a combination of the Apostles Creed, and the questions and answers that follow it.
 - That is where the conversation starts.
 - It is where the debate starts too, as we see in the recent news releases and responses from Lambeth
 - But we gather, not identical in our faith or believe, or in how it forms us and our decisions and our actions
 - We do not claim to have it all figured out, or to understand all of the mysteries
 - But we gather with the common core of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ in the Episcopal tradition
 - And it is in a baptism we were make apparent a holy truth that is already there

- That God loves them, that God reaches out to them, and that nothing they do can sever that love and connection
- And we Baptize to unveil that truth, to name it, give it power and presence and tangibility
- So that we all know and are all reminded of our own intimate relationship with the God who created us.
- It is extremely helpful this morning to see our lessons through this lens
 - Because each of our readings challenges us to have our true selves be visible- to shine, to be unveiled
 - We can begin with Moses up on that mountain- smoke, fire, the ground shakes- all with the uncontainable presence of God
 - God seems to be pulling out the stops to make an unforgettable impression on the Israelites
 - God has heard them, freed them through Moses and plagues and miracles
 - And this concludes a significant portion of their journey, while beginning another one of wandering in the wilderness
 - Moses was God's spokesman, the intermediary and steward of this new relationship being formed between God and the people
 - The commandments would be the start of it- the shape of the type of people God wanted them, and us, to be
 - Whenever Moses was in God's presence and functioning as this holy messenger, his face would begin to shine
 - And his skin was shining when he relayed the commands and laws to the people
 - He would then veil his face until the next time he went before the LORD
 - Interesting translation here- the word translated as "shine" was usually translated as "horn" ¹
 - Michelangelo sculpted a statue of Moses and gave it horns²
 - It was not that Moses simply glowed- there's more going on here than that, but we don't really know
 - I do not think any of this is too literal- I would bet that this is a desperate attempt to describe something beyond words
 - It more than shined, more than horns,
 - It changed Moses appearance in a significant way that likely made everyone scared or uncomfortable, thus the veil

¹ New Interpreter's Bible Commenter, Volume One, CD-ROM version

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses_%28Michelangelo%29

- I cannot help but wonder if being in God's presence didn't make Moses shine with his true self
 - You know the part of us that is made in God's image, our soul, our deepest reality as a child of God
- I wonder if the people didn't get a glimpse of that when Moses' face shined with God's truth and presence.
- His physical body no longer able hide the brilliance underneath the skin
- Fast forward a couple of thousands of years, and we have Jesus transfigured on the top of the mountain
 - And who is there with him except Moses, once again shining,
 - And Elijah who was taken up to heaven in a flaming chariot of fire
 - And Jesus, transfigured, transformed, and shining brightly in robes of dazzling white, much like Moses³
- By having Jesus talk to these great Jewish men of God, Luke has declared that Jesus both knows what God wants us to do like Moses, and also knows God's continuing revelations like Elijah
- Jesus was talking with the possibly the two greatest men of the Jewish faith, and God's voice sounded once again.
- With these three together talking, it was certain that the divine will was being delivered ⁴
- For Luke's gospel, this is the final and overwhelming proof that Jesus was divine
- You could literally see it on his face.
- The veil that shrouds our eyes in this world growing so thin in the mighty presence of its creator that one can see the true nature beneath
- In just a few minutes we will bless the water, we will make our promises both to God and to one another
 - And we will use holy water and holy oil to mark and unveil something extremely precious and divine
 - And that is God's deep and abiding commitment to this world, to all of God's children, and to you and me.
 - The prayer book says that baptism creates an indelible- or permanent- mark on us as Christ's own forever
 - I say that the water simply reveals what God has already made to be true- it makes thin the veils we put on
 - God's love and hope for these babies lives and future, and for ours

³ Arland Hultgrn, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=2/14/2010#

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- And that we are made in God's image, and made for a purpose that is bigger than we are
- Once we glimpse that glowing truth, it changes us, and who we are, and how we treat each other
- How we raise our children, how we bury our dead, how we spend our money and our time
- Because we believe that God, out of love, created the heavens and the earth, and all that dwell therein
- And Jesus came, incarnate of that being, to set us on the right path and to bring us back to God
- To unveil us to our real purpose and real selves
- And we believe that the Holy Spirit continually reminds us- even when it is inconvenient- of that truth of who we are
- And we need the reminder- sometimes life tries to cover up the light that wants to shine
- Layers of hurt, trauma, and even our own bad choices can put layer after layer to cover up who God created us to be
- But God is right there, with gentle, non-toxic cleaner
- Ready to wash that all aside, to remove it and preserve and reveal the child of God underneath.
- Today we participate in the great unveiling, today we reveal God's presence and commitment in our lives
- Let us also renew our faith and our commitment to God and God's work in the world around us
- Let us reveal our true nature and shine brightly in a world that can get pretty dark.

Amen.