

When Do We Radiate Love Most Authentically?

Beloved community, as we reflect on our scripture readings this morning, let's wonder together: When do we radiate love most authentically? Where, with whom, doing what do you embody or share love in a way that flows naturally from the core of who you are? And as we consider our particular ways of radiance, let's also wonder: who has seen and encouraged the true, good aspects of who and how you are? Let us pray:

God of all, radiating your love through each one, be with us as we wonder. Be with us as we settle into honesty and affirmation with ourselves. And as you sit alongside us, grant us serenity to accept things that are not within our power to change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to discern the one from the other.

On this day in the circle of the church year, Transfiguration Sunday meets us at the threshold between Epiphany (the season of light) and Lent (the season of wandering). Transfiguration means a complete change in form or appearance. The story that Kathleen read from the gospel of Matthew depicts a change in Jesus' appearance when he was gathered with his closest friends on a mountaintop, acutely aware of God's presence with him.

Have you recently noted someone near to you looking radiant, glowing, or particularly peaceful? Has anyone recently shared such an observation about your bearing? Those statements often correlate to moments when we feel genuinely connected to the powers of possibility and purpose, or when we feel a deep sense of peace because we are living with integrity as our true and whole selves. We might also note a glow or radiance in moments of genuine joy or pride, at a new beginning, in a return to good health or life balance.

In short, glowing or radiance often aligns with embodying healthy, positive energy. In the times in which we are living; a radiant, glowing, peaceful presence is a small and significant miracle.

I also invite us to hold this question with us today:

Might needed transformations within the communities of which we are part (our families, our congregations, the St. Croix Valley) – might those needed transformations require a bit of individual transfiguration?

Let's ponder Jesus' radiant, glowing moment of transfiguration. We heard Kathleen read, *"And before their eyes, Jesus was transfigured—his face becoming as dazzling as the sun and his clothes as radiant as light."* In *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible, Eugene Peterson writes it like this: *"His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. Sunlight poured from his face. His clothes were filled with light."*

I have suggested that moments when we are noticeably radiant, glowing or peaceful often align with feeling genuinely connected to the powers of possibility and purpose, or with feeling a deep sense of peace because we are living with integrity as our true and whole selves. Jesus seemed to draw on his strong inner glowing, peaceful sense of grounding in his life's purpose as often as he could muster in interactions with others. Sometimes he articulated himself calmly, sometimes fiercely, but always with deep honesty and authenticity.

One of my favorite brief quotes about character and integrity (which I have shared with some of you before) comes from the 1999 film *The Big Kahuna*. Hear these words from a character played by Danny DeVito: *"Then you will attain character because honesty will reach out from inside and tattoo itself all across your face."*

"Then you will attain character because honesty will reach out from inside and tattoo itself all across your face."

What circumstances are you facing at this time that are calling you, urging you to attain character – to let honesty reach out from the glowing core inside you and tattoo itself across your face? In what circumstances do you need to speak out or act out in authentic ways – in order to be a co-conspirator with love and justice? Perhaps *"[Your] appearance could change from the inside out, right before our eyes."*

Later in the reading, we heard a moment on which we less often linger in the Church but which I find worthy of our pause: *"Jesus came toward them and touched them, saying, 'Get up! Don't be afraid.' When they looked up, they did not see anyone but Jesus."* He was their same rabbi and friend, even after the particularly radiant moment had passed.

Oh, that we would pay close enough attention to our loved one that we might notice when their truest glowing core reveals itself – such that we can be ready to encourage them in showing it more often, and to encourage them in trusting that God shines through the truest them at all times (whether the glow is bright or faint).

I have previously shared with you insights from a self-understanding system called the The Enneagram and likely will continue to do so from time to time. It has been extremely helpful for me in navigating both personal and professional relationships. It is a tool on which I draw in moments of pastoral counseling as well. 20th and 21st century South American philosopher Oscar Ichazo developed the Enneagram, incorporating components from mystical Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Buddhism, and ancient Greek philosophy.

The Enneagram presents us humans as fitting within nine types. Each type is oriented to their life experience based on a core need. I have found that this system can increase our clarity, self-compassion, and compassion for others as we each aim to radiate the love of God in communities of which we are part.

I invite you to listen for one or as many as two or three core needs that resonate deeply with you. And listen for how you might most capably radiate love in all of your communities (based on the core need that drives your living).

Are you a reformer, an idealist...

whose core need is – to be good, to have integrity?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by – managing time, prioritizing, teaching others?

Are you a companion, a connector...

whose core need is – to be loved, to be connected with others?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by – cooperating, communicating, and supporting?

Are you an achiever, a producer...

whose core need is – to be accepted, to be worthy?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by - implementing, setting goals, and persuading?

Are you an individualist, a creative one...

whose core need is – to understand yourself, to express yourself?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by – empathizing, creating, and intuiting?

Are you an observer, an investigator...

whose core need is – to be competent, to be capable?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by – analyzing, researching, and developing ideas?

Are you a trouble-shooter, a caretaker...

whose core need is – to be safe, to be supported?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by – being practical, troubleshooting, tending to safety?

Are you an adventurer, an enthusiast...

whose core need is – to be joyful, to be free?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by – exploring, innovating, seeing the big picture?

Are you a challenger, a maverick...

whose core need is – to be strong, to be self-determining?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by – being assertive, being direct, leading?

Or finally (if none of these has resonated with you thus far),

Are you a peacemaker, a mediator...

whose core need is – to be at peace, to be in harmony?

And who, when healthy, can radiate love by – negotiating, being diplomatic, building community?

We need all of us. The world would be impossibly stale if we all radiated in the same way!

I invite us to wonder today: what are the barriers to you shining in ways that radiate from your authentic core?

Who can see through the barriers to the authentic you? Will you reach out to that person for support and encouragement as you seek to dismantle the barriers that are in the way of your radiance?

Let us take heart in the words of our sibling in faith, the epistle writer for today:

“[Y]ou need to know that no prophecy of scripture ever occurred by one’s own interpretation. Prophecy never comes through an act of human will, but comes as people have spoken for God under the power of the Holy Spirit.”

As you open yourself ever further to the Holy Spirit shining through your unique needs and capacities – outward to interact with the rest of the world, remember that these words of blessing are as true of you as they were of Jesus:

“This is my Own, whom I love, and with whom I am well pleased.”

Let us each shine in our authentic ways, radiating that love of the beloved Christ, because Love is counting on us. Amen!

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People’s Congregational Church (Bayport, MN)
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Matthew 17: 1-9, 2 Peter 1: 16-21