

"Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Boston anymore"  
~Dorothy (a minor variation)  
August 6, 2017  
The Rev. Canon Paul Bresnahan

Last night Cindy and I we're out shopping. We stopped to grab a bite at Shellie's Country Cafe. When we observed the cowboy hat, boots and belt buckles, we looked at each other and said; "Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Boston anymore"

Good morning folks and thank you for your wonderful welcome to Helena, Montana. Cindy and I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Bishop Brookhart, Sara Medley and the Cathedral Chapter, and to your wonderful Parish Administrator, Donna Gleaves. You have provided us with a very comfortable place to live in and a basket full of goodies to enjoy. Donna has prepared a pages of agenda items for the interim dean to pay attention to as we begin this journey together. It sets my head to spinning as I contemplate; "Good Lord, where have I landed now!"

When we left Boston it was hazy, hot and humid. When we arrived in Helena, it was smoky, hot and dry. This folks, is a mighty Transfiguration! How appropriate that we begin our time together on the very day that Jesus was transfigured right before their very eyes, high up upon the holy mountain. We have what we call mountains in the Berkshires in my home state, but the Native Americans named the place Massachusetts: "Place of little hills". Those hills are nothing like what we have around us here. How beautiful! I can hardly wait for the smoke to clear to see them in all their magnificent majesty. And as I say that, let us remember those who fight these wildfires. Several have lost their lives in the ongoing battle. We owe them a debt of gratitude for their courage and sacrifice, we owe them our prayers as they face the dangers of the work they do day in and day out.

It was hot and dry in the desert places where Jesus and his disciples ministered. They focused their work around the sick, the poor and the outcast. They brought them the Good News of God's love and their love. With courage and resolve they mightily ministered to their needs.

Then the day came for them to climb the holy mountain. It was cold and windy up there if it was anything like the holy mountains we visited when we took a bus load of high school kids to the Holy Land.

There was an encounter with the Holy, as so often happens when we are with Jesus. As they prayed there, suddenly Jesus was transfigured and his face shone like the sun, his clothing became a dazzling white. They spoke of his departure, interestingly enough, and as they did, Moses and Elijah appeared and the Glory of God radiated through them.

Peter, dear Peter, our very own Peter didn't know what to say. So he said the only thing he could come up with; "Lets make a couple of lean to's of the sort you make in a mountain when you're going to spend the night and lets stay a while. Let us dwell in this moment." Imagine here is Jesus, the One with power over sin and death. Moses the one who brought us up out of slavery in Egypt and into freedom in the Promised Land and then gave us the Law. And Elijah the Prophet who did not shrink from confronting the Powers and Principalities of his time with the Word of God. Neither did Moses shrink from Pharaoh nor Jesus fall away from facing Pilate or the Temple authorities.

Then as suddenly as they all appeared together, Moses and Elijah were gone and only Jesus remained before their eyes. They heard it plain as day; "This is my Beloved Son, listen to him now!"

You will remember what Jesus said. He spoke on the basis of what he did. After all, "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, but the one who does the will of the one who sent me". You will remember the Sermon on the Mount. You will remember how he cured the sick, and those suffering from every form of mental illness, and how he went out of his way to visit the outcast and the lepers of his day. Not everyone was thrilled with this approach to human need. And Jesus paid dearly for his love for us all but he rose again from the dead and here he is now in our very midst this day in the power of his resurrection.

Our church has undergone quite a transfiguration in recent years. We are seeking to understand anew what Paul meant when he said; "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." ~Galatians 3. The Gospel is not about Jew or Greek alone but about any race or ethnicity. It is not about slave or free alone but all economic classifications. Not even gender identity can factor into consideration about the love of Jesus when you think about it. We are all one in Jesus. We have all put on Christ as a garment.

Our own blessed Peter, the Rock upon which Jesus continues to build God's Church, when speaking to the Gentiles, namely the "outsiders" the "foreigners" of his time, said in his glorious Easter Sermon; "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." ~Acts 10

Every one of you gathered here this morning shines with the same kind of Glory with which Jesus shines. I can see it in your faces. And I see no exceptions, even after these first 45 years in parish ministry 45, thanks be to God.

Mind you there are characters in our midst. There are varieties of gifts, opinion, conviction, temperament, and every Dickensian peculiarity. After all, we are Episcopalians. But when we gather in this holy place and at this altar rail we bring who we are to God and to one another and somehow we gather rubbing shoulder to shoulder in the very midst of God's Glory. The collect of the day proclaims that as Jesus is wonderfully transfigured so may we be "delivered from the disquietude of this world" and behold God in Glory. It is this very Glory which you show forth in your lives, it is your joy that will bring people to Jesus. Be radiant! Be joyful!

There is another Sunday in the church year when we observe the Transfiguration. I love the way the Collect for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany puts it; "O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory."

We gather week by week delivered from the disquietude of the world we live in so that we may be transfigured from glory to glory. Bring yourselves and others to the Glory of God and the Joy of Jesus!

I hope you allow yourselves to live in this glory. From the moment I first entered this building, I could sense it; you know what I mean; that breathtaking sense of the holy. When Donna first showed me this place I was especially taken with the stained glass windows. Then come to find out, they were made by Charles J Connick in his studios in Boston. Aha! No wonder I feel so much at home here. As we bask in the beauty of this place may I invite you to allow yourselves to be transfigured from glory to glory especially in the inward places of your very souls.

Connick wrote of the beauty of our encounter with God in these words; "If churches are made radiant and beautiful places of worship, we can have a spiritual regeneration without anyone knowing what is going on. Beauty can preach as very few with bundles of words can preach. I want to make beautiful interiors for both churches and souls. I want folks to hear my windows singing."

What does God want of us and of this Cathedral as we seek a transfiguration of the human soul? My wife Cindy has a way of bringing me back to earth. Seems there are always bills to pay and stuff to do. You and I know that no matter how glorious the mountaintop moment may be, we always have to come back to reality. The fact of sin and wickedness and death is all around us. How shall we organize ourselves as a Cathedral to confront that sin and wickedness and death? It has been said of Mother Teresa that she was "something beautiful for God". Her mission was anything but beautiful. She faced into the ugliness of death and loved them to the Gate of Heaven. Jesus came down from the mountain to face his crucifixion, followed then by his resurrection.

You are something beautiful for God especially when you organize your lives around the suffering of the people around you and when you have the courage to become agents of God's Justice. No Toto, we're not in Boston anymore. We're right here in Helena. May God grant that we may shine with the radiance of Christ's Glory. And what is it that God requires of us but "to do Justice, to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with our God". ~Micah 6:8. Stay tuned folks, next week we celebrate 150 years of mission and ministry in and from this place. God grant that what we do in our time together may guide us toward the next 150 years of worship and service.

In the Name of God, the most holy undivided and everlasting Trinity. Amen.