

Church of the Crossroads  
Last Sunday after Epiphany/Transfiguration Sunday  
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## MADE FOR SHINING

Luke 9:28-43

Every time a cell phone rings during the course of a meeting, or at a concert, or during a conversation, my blood pressure goes up just a little. I am reminded of the concert featuring my very favorite Jazz singer, Diana Krall. As she was introducing her next number, someone's cell phone rang so that everyone in the Blaisdell Concert Hall could hear it. Diana Krall, as quick as a flash, said, "If it's that guy who's been trying to get a date with me, tell him 'no' and then shut the damn thing off!"

I have been trying to understand what it is that annoys me so about cell phones that ring and interrupt the flow of an occasion. Is it just the interruption, or does my annoyance run deeper. I am just now beginning to understand my own reaction to these cell phone intrusions. I get angry because the cell phone intrudes and cuts off my relationship to the world around me. It may be my enjoyment of a piece of sublime music. It may be my involvement in something important that someone is trying to say at a meeting. It may be my relationship to another human being who is revealing something of himself or herself to me.

Stroll down Bishop Street at a noon hour and observe how many people are walking with cell phones attached to their ears. They are oblivious as to what is going on around them, and certainly to the presence of others on the street. Or witness hikers who are on cell phones as they hike along a trail. They are so absorbed in what they are hearing on their cell phones that they miss the beauty and wonder of the creation itself.

Technology tends to separate us from the immediate experience of our surroundings and our relationship with others. Instead of meeting others face to face, or even calling them on the phone (at an appropriate time, of course), we email them. Can you imagine someone approaching a pastor or a counselor with a personal problem, and the pastor or counselor says, "Why don't you send me an email!"

We can say that technology in itself has no intrinsic ethical or moral value other than the fact that it can be useful at times. I would be the first to admit that it can be useful. I am not a Luddite. You may recall the Luddites. They were a social movement of English Textile workers in the early 1800's named after a mythical leader, Ned Ludd. The Luddites protested against the changes produced by the Industrial Revolution, often by destroying textile machines. (I admit- I looked all this up on the Internet!). No, I am not about to throw away my cell phone, or my computer, my Palm Pilate, or microwave. All these can be useful. I am not sure, however, that they have really enhanced the human quality of our lives.

I am reminded of the cemetery plot where my parent's ashes are buried. The plot overlooks one of the most beautiful salmon pools to be found on the Annapolis River in Nova Scotia. As a child, I remember going there with my father as he fished for salmon. Those were amazing afternoons. The sound of water slipping over rocks, finding muskrat holes, discovering a beaver dam, listening to the wind through the trees, and the excitement when Dad hooked a salmon – all these were part of the experience. Today, there are no salmon in the river. Chalk it up to a power plant further down the river, acid rain caused by industry along the Eastern seaboard, and perhaps now by global warming.

We are in danger of losing our relationship with the earth. Those afternoons along the Annapolis River were moments of transfiguration in my life. For me, the world took on what may be described as a kind of shining.

These days, it takes much more effort on our part to get in touch with the creation and even with one another. Technology and the hectic pace of life have begun to dull our senses and blur our vision. As we are more and more out of relationship with the earth and with one another, the earth itself has begun to suffer. A case in point is surely global warming. If we human beings were in a right relationship with the earth and with its people, we would not allow anything like global warming take place.

Our detachment from that which makes for life is the problem. An old New Yorker cartoon expressed it well. A family is seated around a television set. The television picture is in color. Everything else - the room, the members of family, and the scene visible through the windows – is in

gray. Somehow, we need to restore within ourselves a sense of wonder, which is perhaps the one thing that can encourage a renewed appreciation for the beauty and fragility of the creation and the nurturing of our human relationships.

The story of the transfiguration, which is always read on the last Sunday after Epiphany, has much to teach us. The story itself is familiar. Jesus takes Peter and James and John up the mountain to pray. There, away from the stress and strain of discipleship, Jesus is transfigured. The appearance of his face changes, and his clothes become dazzling white. He is seen there, speaking with Moses, the lawgiver and Elijah, the first of the prophets, and a voice is heard, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him."

This moment of transfiguration is transformative. Many scholars say that this story is actually a resurrection story that has been placed here, just before Jesus embarks on his journey towards Jerusalem and the cross. Perhaps the gospel writer wants to anticipate the conclusion of the story that will end not with suffering but with life made new.

Of course, that is exactly what we human beings need. We need to experience and know a newness of life. We need our vision cleared. We need to lift our heads. We need a restoration of our relationship to the human community and to the earth itself.

We need, we can say, moments of transfiguration, moments that can remind us that we and the earth are made for shining. I love the way Frederick Buechner describes the transfiguration and the transfigured moments of our own lives.

It is as strange a scene as there is in the Gospels. Even without the voice from the cloud to explain it, they had no doubt what they were witnessing. It was Jesus of Nazareth all right, the man they'd tramped many a dusty mile with, whose mother and brother they knew, the one they'd seen as hungry, tired, footsore as the rest of them. But it was also the Messiah, the Christ, in his glory. It was the holiness of the man shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it they were almost blinded.

Even with us something like that happens once in a while. The face of a man walking his child in the park, of a woman

picking peas in the garden, of sometimes even the unlikeliest person listening to a concert, say, or standing barefoot in the sand watching the waves roll in, or just having a beer at a Saturday baseball game in July. Every once and so often, something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that it's almost beyond bearing.

- *Whistling in the Dark*, p. 107-108

When we can no longer experience such moments, because we are so busy with our technological devices, or trying to do all that needs doing, or simply because we have lost the art of seeing, it's not just that we are missing out, so to speak. It's also that our very humanity is in danger.

One might say that the crisis we face is at its very core spiritual in nature. Somehow, you and I need those heightened moments when spirit and matter come together in a transformative way, so that we can live life with meaning and purpose. Without those moments of transfiguration, life will surely become dull and drab, and the creation itself will suffer for want of human appreciation and concern.

Certainly, we cannot sustain such moments of transfiguration in our lives. Peter and James and John want to remain on the mountain, but they cannot. There is work of healing and restoration to be done. There is a journey to Jerusalem and a cross that must be undertaken. As it was for them, so it is for us. There are all those daily duties and tasks that need our attention. Yet, this life of ours, so filled with activity, will have little purpose or meaning without those times when life is transfigured and made new, those times when we can set aside all our *doing* and celebrate *being*, those times when we know who we are and whose we are.

So, when we find ourselves on a beach or on a mountain trail, or when we are engaged with other human beings, let's turn our cell phones off. The possibilities for newness of life may not come along all that often, and to receive them, our eyes and our hearts are going to have to be open to the world around us. It would be so tragic to miss the opportunities for newness that God is ready to grant us. With eyes and hearts open, we can indeed be ready for those moments of transfiguration, those moments when we know all over again that God dwells in us and in all things and that we and all things dwell in God, and that therefore we and all things are made for shining. All thanks and praise be to God.