

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa
February 15, 2015
The Last Sunday after the Epiphany
2nd Kings 2:1-12
2nd Corinthians 4:3-6
Mark 9:2-9

It truly is amazing how much information and news we take in each week. There is family news about illness, or crisis, or travel, or celebrations or promotion or some other change in the family. Then of course we have the usual dose of local news, weather and sports. Internationally we have had a steady diet of news about the economies of the world, and continuing wars and massacres in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and Nigeria. Nationally, this week most of the news was about the news as we heard about the suspension of Brian Williams, the death of reporter Bob Simon, and the announcement of the coming end of Jon Stewart's time on the Daily Show.

Two events however stand out above all the others this week. The murder of 3 Muslim students in North Carolina: Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha and Razan Abu-Salha has touched the hearts of people of all faiths throughout our country and the world. On Friday I heard a recent interview taped for an NPR segment in which Yusor Abu Salha, the youngest of the three spoke. She said: "Growing up in America has been such a blessing, and you know, although in some ways I do stand out, such as the hijab I wear on my head, the head covering there's still so many ways that I feel so embedded in the fabric that is, you know, our culture. And that's the beautiful thing here, is that it doesn't matter where you come from. There are so many different people from so many different places of different backgrounds and religions, but here we're all one, one culture."

The other event that stands out was the death of the young aide worker, Kayla Mueller in Syria. As we heard of her death, we also heard the words she wrote before she was taken hostage and from the letter she wrote to her family from prison. Such powerful faith, and beauty in her words. She wrote of the spiritual motivation that led her to her ministry of caring for refugees: "I find God in the suffering eyes reflected in mine. If this is how you are revealed to me, this is how I will forever seek you... I will always seek God. Some people find God in church. Some people find God in nature. Some people find God in love; I find God in suffering. I've known for some time what my life's work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering." After she was taken hostage, from her prison Kayla wrote: "I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our creator because literally there was no else ... and by God and by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in freefall. I have been shown in darkness, light and have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful."

Nothing I can say can add anything to the powerful witness of these two women. Indeed, their words are probably all the sermon we need to hear today. Still, I want to use Kayla's words this weekend to take us to a reflection on the scripture, especially the words of Paul, and the Gospel story of the Transfiguration. It is also my hope that these readings, and the letters of Kayla Mueller might lead us into a deeper reflection on the season of Lent that begins Wednesday.

Let light shine out of darkness. On January 6, the church celebrated the 12th day of Christmas, the feast of the Epiphany. That feast began a season of celebrating light shining out of darkness. As the days of the January and February grew lighter, the Gospel proclaimed how the light of God grew brighter in the life of Jesus. This Epiphany light came to full radiance in the transfiguration of Jesus. In the transfiguration, Jesus shines with the radiance of God. The light of God shines in the face of Jesus.

Jesus is aware that the disciples are not able to fully understand what is being revealed to them. On the way down the mountain he instructs them to say nothing until after the son of man is raised from the dead. Do not tell anyone what you have seen, because, what you saw on the mountain of transfiguration, does not compare with what you will see on the mountain of Calvary. The light you have seen is nothing compared to the light you will see.

Jesus descends the mountain of transfiguration and leads the disciples on a journey to the mountain of resurrection.

We join the disciples in this journey from transfiguration to resurrection in the 40 days of lent. Lent is a season of repentance in which we turn away from our sins and renew our commitment to follow Jesus. Lent is the season for us to bear our cross, and carry the cross of others and in order that we might share the glory of Jesus. The disciplines of lent are the crosses we carry to Calvary and the light of resurrection.

Kayla Mueller found light in her service to those in need and in the darkness of her captivity. She carried the cross and now she shares the glory of the resurrection light of journey. Our journey is not as dramatic, but can be just as powerful. Lent invites us to find Jesus in service to those in our world who suffer. Lent invites us through prayer, sacrifice and fasting to turn away from sin toward the light of Jesus. We know, dear friends, that an honest look at our sin is difficult. To honestly look at the grip sin has on my life is terrifying. To admit the ways my sin contribute to the suffering of the world is painful. And yet, it is in the midst of the pain and terror of my sin, that I can also see the light of resurrection. In the midst of my sin, I feel the grace of forgiveness. In the midst of the darkness in our world, the light of Jesus shines.

On the way down the mountain Jesus tells the disciples: Don't tell a single person what you have seen because truly you ain't seen nothing yet. The glory you have seen is nothing compared to what you will see.

At the transfiguration the face of Jesus shines with the radiance of God. He promises his people something even greater. Jesus promises that those who follow him through his suffering death will share in the radiance of his resurrection. Those who follow him to Calvary will share the radiance of God's glory. We believe that Deah, Yasur, Razon and Kayla have passed through the darkness of death and now fully share the radiance of God's glorious light. We hope, we work for the day when God's radiant light shines for us. We hope, we work for the day when God's radiant light shines for all creation.