

What It Takes (Luke 9:28-43a)

Jazz Sunday, February 14, 2010

A familiar request to me as the pastor – and I am sure also to Larry, our Music Director – is that we should provide a worship experience on Sunday that can carry folks happily and meaningfully through the week. It's a big order. For one thing, as you have probably noticed, neither Larry nor I are God. At least I am not. Larry can speak for himself. For another thing, worship isn't all entertainment and performance. Worship is like putting on special glasses to see with – God's glasses – so we can take *a long and loving look at the real* in our lives – the way God sees us, with love and laughter and forgiveness and power. So worship – even excellent, well-ordered worship at its best! – is an often messy business. After all, we are talking about *the real* in our lives, and how often do the words “excellent and well-ordered” come to mind as you contemplate your week just gone by or the stuff that you expect in the your week just ahead? Or perhaps I should just speak for myself. My weeks are seldom exactly as I plan them. Reminds me of the joke about telling God your plans and hearing God's plan!

The way I view it, worship should inject into Sunday a conviction that we have a purpose here and that we get our purpose from God who created us. Makes sense, right? Our purpose is neither powerless nor sad. *We have an awesome God! We have a God who is neither powerless nor sad! We have a God who wants to shine on our faces on Sunday like Jesus on the mountain top! We have a God who wants us to head down the mountain on Sunday with a shining in our hearts! We have a God who wants us on Monday to mix it up with the demons down in the valley and send them packing!*

Now, imagine for a moment that God has a plan for our world. And you and I *are* the plan. Let me be *a little humble* here. You and I are not God's whole plan for salvation. We are not – no matter how good worship is here this morning! – going to go out of here knowing on Monday how to save Haiti, salvage health care reform on Tuesday or even how to cure a boy of his convulsions on Friday. We are disciples, but we are not all-powerful just yet! Still, we are essential to God's plan. And God wants to send us down the mountain working from his blueprints.

Our job is to *shine*. That's the plan. Why? Because down there in the valley of the Monday world there are demons: demons of road rage, demons of spyware and Trojan viruses, demons of bullying, demons of back-stabbing, demons of wishy-washiness, demons of political dysfunction, demons of *boredom* and *desperation*. All sorts of demons! We know these demons! Not funny little red guys with forked tails! No. Demons that are simply the spirits of our own times that convulse real lives. And the only thing these demons are afraid of – after Jesus himself – are people who shine with the glory on Jesus's face.

So what does it take to shine? Let me be more specific: *What does it take to shine on Monday so the demons don't win?*

First, *believe that your shining is God's plan*. That's what we do here on Sunday. Invite you to believe in your own shining. That's what Moses and Elijah and Jesus are talking together about on the mountaintop – how to get the shining down into the valley below. Call it law or prophecy or salvation – the plan is to get the shining down where people live and the demons have been in charge for far too long. And you are the plan.

Second, *practice shining*. Forget the training manual. Stop asking *what would Jesus do*. Just do what Jesus does: hang out with strangers; love the unloveable – maybe even yourself; turn over a few money-changers' tables; take time be alone with your God even when others may be looking for you; be out there and public when fear says it's time to hide; and never, ever, hesitate to stop and give thanks in all things, to the Lord God who shines in you. I promise you one thing. Practice shining and *you will never see yourself as a victim again*. Stop being a victim and you'll begin to see the plan.

Third, *ignore the demons*. Especially your own. Don't give them power to run you. I don't know what your particular demons sound like. I just know the voices get loud as soon as you practice shining: *You ought to be ashamed. Aren't you afraid? Are you sure you're good enough? Haven't you tried this before? Who are you to say that?* And here's my favorite and one of my all-time personal demon voices: *Aren't you being irresponsible?* Hear me on this.

When the demon voices get loud, *it's good news!* Those demons are afraid you're really going to shine and make them disappear!

Fourth, and finally, say **Yes** to shining. Make a **commitment** to shine on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Listen to scripture I found on the side of a coffee cup one time. It said: *The irony of commitment is that it is deeply liberating – in work, in play, in love. The act frees you from the tyranny of your internal critic, from the fear that likes to dress itself up as rational hesitation. To commit is to remove your own head as the barrier to your life.* Like it says in the Psalms, *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me?* So, say Yes. Start walking on Monday. Keep walking on Tuesday. Walk on on Wednesday. Don't stop on Thursday. Finish strong on Friday. You will be given what you need as soon as you ask!

To shine, you have to get off the script of the world we live in. Why? Because the demons live on script. Because Jesus lives off script. Because off script is where the power lies to keep us shining.

Years ago, Robert Fulghum told a wonderful story in his book Uh-Oh. It's the story of a spring play in an elementary school. A special performance this particular year. The spring play is to be presented to a regional teachers' conference. The play is Cinderella and everyone in the class wants a part. Girls want to be Cinderella. Boys want to be the handsome prince. Of course not everybody gets the lead parts, so soon others – desperate for some role! -- want to be the wicked step-mother or the ugly step-sister or the prince's footman.

Everybody gets a part. Except Norman. Norman is a quiet kid. He isn't shy or bashful. He just doesn't talk unless he has something to say. Of all the kids in the class, Norman has a mind of his own and is perfectly comfortable just being himself.

The teacher is no fool, so she stops the classroom chaos and says to Norman: *Norman, all the main parts are taken, but I am sure we can find an extra part for you. What would you like to be?* So Norman smiles back at her and says, *I would like to be the pig.*

But, Norman, says the teacher not knowing quite how to handle this, *but Norman, there is no pig in Cinderella.* Norman smiles and says, *There is now.*

So Norman devises his own costume – a paper cup for a nose, long pink underwear and a pink pipe cleaner for a curly tail. They get to rehearsal and Norman the pig follows Cinderella everywhere in the story and mirrors the emotions of the story. If Cinderella is happy, the pig is ecstatic. If Cinderella is afraid, the pig cowers. If Cinderella is sad, the pig droops. One look at Norman and you could see the real feelings behind the story.

Oh, did I mention that Norman the pig barks? This is a problem for the teacher and she explains to Norman in rehearsal that even if there is a pig in Cinderella, pigs don't bark. To which Norman replies, *this pig does.*

Come the big night. Norman mirrors the action silently and the audience, a little uncomfortable at first, begins to feel the real story. Sadness, fear, hope, disaster, hope rekindled. When finally the handsome prince places the glass slipper on Cinderella's foot, Norman the pig breaks his silence and begins dancing with joy and barking and leaping about on his hind legs. And the audience begins to see that Cinderella is not a performance to be politely clapped at, but a human story about transformation to be taken in and loved. You see, Norman had the courage to go off-script and inject life and laughter and surprise into a tired old story.

Norman is so like Jesus. The religious leaders and political pundits of Jesus' day had a script for Messiahship. And when Jesus started wandering off the script, they screamed at him: *Messiahs do not hang out with losers! Messiahs do not forgive enemies! Messiahs don't break sabbath rules! Messiahs do not question our authority about adulterers! Messiahs do*

not turn over our tables in the Temple! Messiahs are not irresponsible! Messiahs do not invite sleazy business men, terrorists, dockworkers, bullying tax collectors, smelly fishermen and deranged outcasts to be disciples!

To which Jesus replied: *This Messiah does*. And so the shining came down off the mountain.

On Sunday, even on Jazz Sunday with the classy support of the Hot Cat Jazz Band and a Mardi Gras Coffee Hour, we cannot make you shine! Nobody can shine for you! Not even Jesus! But Jesus can shine *in you* – if you ask him to. You don't even have to stop to ask. So start practicing! Bark a bit on the stage of your week! Jesus will find you. And the demons will start to quake as soon as you begin to say: ***This disciple does!***

Amen